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THE
VISIONS OF A PROPHET
STUDIES IN ZECHARIAH

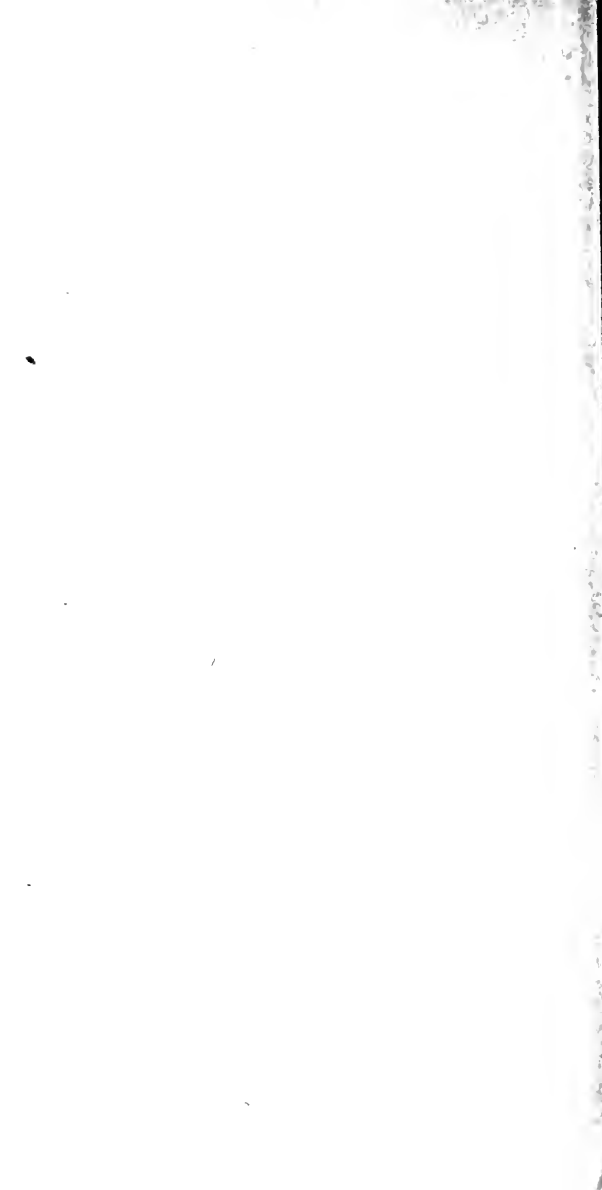
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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

PAGE

THE FIRST THREE VISIONS, . . . I

CHAPTER II

THE FOURTH VISION, . . . 23

CHAPTER III

VISION OF THE CANDLESTICK, . . . 45

CHAPTER IV

THE FLYING ROLL AND THE EPHAH, 68

CHAPTER V

	PAGE
RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES, . . .	92

CHAPTER VI

THE SHEPHERD OF ISRAEL, . . .	116
-------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VII

NATIONAL REVIVAL, . . .	139
-------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONSUMMATION, . . .	160
-------------------------	-----

STUDIES IN ZECHARIAH



CHAPTER I

THE FIRST THREE VISIONS

IN the first two chapters of this Book there are recorded three visions, all of them of an encouraging character. They were seen by the prophet by night, and probably while he slept. And as Dante in his vision represents himself as accompanied by a guide who interpreted to him all that he saw, so Zechariah, unable himself to understand the meaning of what he saw, is instructed by an angel that appeared to talk with him in his sleep.

In the first vision, Zechariah sees with all the vividness which characterises the scenes to which dreams introduce us, a 'bottom,' or small plot of hollow, low-lying ground, planted with myrtle-trees. It was probably an actual spot well known to the prophet; and

if he was accustomed to retire to it for prayer, as our Lord retired among the olive-trees outside Jerusalem, it becomes at once apparent how it should be this spot which was now suggested to him. For no doubt he had often in this quiet garden or plantation used the very words he now hears the angel of the Lord using: 'O Lord of hosts, how long wilt Thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which Thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?' Zechariah was a public-spirited man whom no private prosperity could compensate for the indignities his people were suffering during the dreary, ignominious years after their return to Jerusalem. This had been the burden of all his thoughts as he nervously paced under the shade of these myrtles; this his uniform cry as he cast himself perplexed and pained on the earth beneath them. It was this watching and praying, this taking upon himself

the burden of his people, which enabled him at length to see what God was really preparing for them.

But familiar as was the myrtle grove, it was to-night thronged with figures before unseen. The mounted scouts of Jehovah seemed to be gathering there to-night from all parts of the earth to give in their reports. These reports presented an unusual, a marvellous agreement. In every quarter there was peace and prosperity. The whole earth seemed to be enjoying a time of rest and golden weather. 'All the earth sitteth still, and is at rest.' It was the humbling contrast to this prosperous condition, in the mean appearance presented by the people of Israel, that struck their leader, the man on the red horse, and caused him to exclaim: 'How long, amidst this universal prosperity, is Israel to be the strange and sorrowful exception? How is it that the one dark spot on the bright and joyful earth is precisely that spot

where God's peculiar people dwell? Is God's inheritance the only kingdom which does not exhibit the marks of a beneficent government and a happy social condition?'

To this Intercessor—this horseman who watches over Israel—God answers 'with good words and comfortable words.' This closes the vision; and then the interpreting angel bids Zechariah report to the people the substance or significance of it, to the effect that although God had given His people into the hand of their enemies that they might be chastised, yet these enemies had gone too far, had entered into the work of correction with too evident a zest, and had overstepped their commission; and that now God would compensate to His people for their sorrows.

The practical outcome or substantial meaning of this vision was this: that to every one who sees with eyes cleansed and directed aright, the Angel of the Lord, or God Incarnate, appears,

ready mounted, prepared to interpose in His people's behalf, and watchfully receiving the reports of His commissioners from all parts of the earth. It can readily be imagined what a difference this vision would make in the courage and hopes of the people, with what different heart and conversation they would go out to their building next morning, having been assured that the Lord thought their punishment had gone far enough, and that now He was to show His mercies to them. It is easy to conceive with what tremulous joy Zechariah sought the myrtle grove, how he would scarcely have been surprised had he seen it still peopled with those heavenly forms, and how to him it was henceforth always hallowed ground. To his bodily eye there was in the morning no added brilliance in the air; the turf bore no mark of the horses' hoofs that had trodden it; the silence was unbroken as it had been last evening when he had almost thought

heaven deaf and hard as he prayed and heard no answer; and yet all was changed to his inward eye, the silence did not now discompose him, he felt no more as if he had the sole charge and burden of his people.

As human history presents a constant recurrence of similar experiences under altered circumstances and in new individuals, so the history of God's people very much repeats itself; and the helps and solace provided for one generation are found serviceable to all. We have our dull and ignominious times when nothing seems to prosper with us, when we feel as if everything Divine were remote or unreal, when our prayers have so long been unanswered that we begin seriously to doubt whether prayer avails. To have an eye for things spiritual makes all the difference at these times. The veil that hides the forces which really rule this world is lifted and we see things in their true relations. We see the swift couriers of Jehovah incessantly

streaming in from all parts of the earth, we see that there is nothing unobserved, and that He to whom this detailed information is present does not wait to be urged or prompted by us to take action, but that with gravity, earnestness, and impassioned tenderness, He interposes at the fitting juncture. While we are thinking that our efforts to set matters right are not observed or regarded by any higher power, there is a grave and comprehensive consideration of our affairs, a sense of responsibility which accepts and discharges the management of all human interests, an efficient activity to which ours is as negligence.

The second vision speaks for itself. When the four horns had tossed and gored Israel, four carpenters are sent to cut them down. God's zest in removing the executioners of His justice reveals His reluctance to punish. When the causes of distress have done their work they are removed. As a matter of actual

experience, men who have suffered great reverses of fortune declare that no sooner had the calamity brought them to the point of a true, hearty and permanent submission to God about it, than it was removed. There are no doubt irremovable distresses, but God can introduce into the life alleviations of distress and compensating joys. He can at all events enable us to see as clearly as Zechariah saw that He will not give us over to unlimited punishment, but allows present distresses only as temporary expedients which may fit us for more enduring and perfect happiness.

The third vision of Zechariah was also based on what was in his thoughts and under his eye from day to day—plans for restoring the city. He seemed to see a man proceeding to take measurements for the laying out of streets and walls. As we often get notice of city improvements by seeing surveyors with theodolite and chain at work, so this

man with the measuring line explained that he was going to ascertain the size and capabilities of Jerusalem, and to see what could be made of the ruins. But as he passes on to his work the angel is told to run and stop him and prevent him from measuring the city and planning new walls and fortifications. He is assured that it was useless marking out boundaries, because the city is destined to exceed all ordinary dimensions and become so great that no walls would be capable of containing it. It will overflow into suburbs, adjoining villages and even annex the neighbouring towns, so as to present the appearance not of a walled city, but of a densely - peopled district. Neither would any danger result from this extra-mural overflow. As Jerusalem had in former times gloried in the strength of her natural position and impregnable fortifications, so now 'I,' says Jehovah, 'will be unto her a wall of fire round about.' The expression, a 'wall of fire,' was pro-

bably first suggested in the wilderness days by the camp fires which outlying parties used to scare the wild beasts, and it was retained as a vigorous way of expressing an impenetrable defence.

What Nehemiah, who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, made of this prophecy it is impossible to say. It would have been interesting to trace the fortunes of a city which in those days had been bold enough to rely on a spiritual defence and not on fortifications. Certain it is that the walls of Jerusalem were ultimately her destruction; encouraging, as they did, the Jews to make so obstinate a stand against the Romans that an almost unparalleled, if not quite unparalleled, slaughter and misery was the result. But though this part of the prediction was suspended through the unbelief and timidity of the Jews, that part which promised an overflowing population was abundantly fulfilled, the whole land being very soon densely filled

with people, and Jerusalem being found too small and confined within the walls built round her.

The unexpected development of Jerusalem is repeated in all well-placed cities. In many old cities, if we wish to see the original town - walls, we must leave the outskirts and walk to almost the heart of the city. The original builders had as little faith as these Jews in the great increase of the population. Municipal corporations in our day must often wish their predecessors in office had seen a little further into the future, or had had some Zechariah among them to warn them of the growth of their city. The provision made by a past generation for the sick, the uneducated, the criminal, the dead and the living, is all found insufficient. The cramped railway stations, the dangerous sewage systems, the meagre water-supply, all teach us how prone men are to act as if what served their turn would serve the future as well. They have in general no regard to the

general expansion of society; they do not seriously take into account the progress of things.

But the law of this world is progress. And where there is no change there can be no progress. This does not mean that wherever there is change there is progress, that every change is a change for the better. But it means that if we are to fall in with God's law we are to be on the outlook for change and are to be ready to make it with a glad abandonment of the old wherever reason and conscience approve the new. To remain as we are, to believe that what was good enough for our fathers is good enough for us, is to throw away the advantages our fathers won for us and to repudiate the fundamental law of the world. The constant and essential problem of the politician is to adjust the institutions and laws of the country to the growing intelligence, and the growing sense of justice, and the growing wants of the people.

And this is the problem for the

Church as well. If the Church cannot look ahead and make provision for growth, she will forgo a large part of her function. The Church must take into account that she is destined to be world-wide; and she must therefore beware of running up walls which can only cramp her and retard her expansion, and prove that she has no faith in her own living power of growth. She must be such a corporation as can admit Hindoos, Chinamen, savages. She must not tie herself to any practice which cannot be adopted by all men everywhere. Most religions have made this mistake; they have limited their expansion and made themselves local by demanding belief in what reason rejects or by requiring observance of practices which it is impossible for all men to observe. And Christianity is made local in so far as it is identified with certain practices which it is impossible for some nations or for some persons to adopt; in so far as it is identified

with Western forms of thought and with traditions which have grown up during the history of the Church. To make certain forms of worship compulsory, to prohibit divergence from our own creed and from our own habits, is simply to do what is here reprehended; it is to limit the expansion of Christianity, to shut ourselves up within walls of our own building and have little or no share in the extension of true religion. Be comprehensive, be progressive, is the voice of this vision to the Church.

But is there not a danger in this counsel? Is there not a risk that we may be trodden down or corrupted by outsiders if we have not a well-defined and solid wall around us, through the gates of which none can pass without strictest scrutiny? Certainly there is a risk. Wherever faith leads, there is a risk. But it remains true that all we really have to rely on is the promise here given: 'I will be unto her a wall of fire round about.' No

subscription of strict creeds, no adhesion to traditional practices, no careful discipline in doctrine and worship will protect the Church; but a right spirit, the spirit of God, will. Nothing but the inhabitation of God in the Church will defend her. The Church has come to resemble ancient Greece, where every town was a state by itself, with laws, customs, and interests of its own. It is with us as with them; a great part of our energy is spent in keeping right our relations with other Churches, in steering our own little Church through the troubled sea of jealousies, rival schemes and so on. And it will be well if the end is not also similar, if we do not so bite and devour one another that we become an easy prey to the common foe. Sound creeds, reasonable forms of worship, wholesome practices, are all most useful, but they become worse than useless when they separate us in spirit from our fellow Christians, and are depended upon for defence.

The great increase of population here predicted was to arise partly from the return of a larger number of Jews from Babylon. Very significant are the urgent appeals that were found necessary to move them to return. 'Flee from the land of the north. Deliver thyself, O Zion that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon.' They had even to be warned that punishment was to fall on Babylon, and that they would share in it if they did not escape. For people are always apt to get hardened to that deserted and distant condition into which God banishes them for their sin. The want of high spiritual communings which at first a man mourned over he gradually gets used to. The gaiety and dissipation which were distasteful to him, he can at last scarcely abandon. The cessation from Christian work which at first he recognised as an infliction, he becomes so used to that it frets and hardens him to resume it. Just as the child who is banished into another room is at first

wild with misery, but very speedily begins to find amusement there and is sorry to be recalled.

And as the conquering troops of Darius would make no distinction between Jew and Babylonian, but would slay indiscriminately—so the common visitations and disasters that wait upon wrongdoing make no nice distinctions between those who profess themselves of the world and those who assume to be something better. Men often promise themselves impunity while engaging in sins which they know commonly bring consequences much to be dreaded, and they cherish this expectation of impunity on the ground that though sinners who boldly follow such courses are punished, yet they themselves are not such men. But they are awakened out of this dream by the sharp blow of natural law. Commercial distress makes no distinction between the man who has overdriven his business on avowedly worldly principles and the man who has over-sSpeculated

while he has also nursed himself in the belief that he is the child of God. He may be a child of God, but if this fact did not prevent him behaving like a man of the world it will not prevent him suffering as men of the world suffer. A parent may pray for his children, may teach them much Christian truth, and may lay the flattering unction to his soul that they will turn out well; but if he does not see that they learn to love duty more than pleasure, and if he does not by his own life show them that duty is more than pleasure, he will find himself involved in the consequences which always result from neglect and half-discharged responsibilities. Natural law, in short, is no respecter of persons, and utterly disregards the professions we make and the fancies in which we dream our life away. Justice is blind, and weighs deeds irrespective of the person who has thrown them into her scale.

In closing this prophecy Zechariah encourages the people to

expect that not only would Jerusalem be filled to overflowing with their kinsmen, but that God would dwell there. But the prediction runs on in language which seems too magnificent for any contemporary events : ' Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be My people.' This is characteristic of Old Testament prophecy. It is always occasioned by some present need of the generation among whom the prophet lives, but the language employed seems larger than the occasion requires. Prophets did not arise in quiet times, when there was no special call for warning or encouragement or instruction. They appeared in emergencies, and spoke of matters within the view of those they addressed. Zechariah speaks of the rebuilding of the Temple that was lying half-built before the eyes of the people ; he speaks of that very Jerusalem in which they lived and from which they dated their letters. And regarding these well-known ob-

jects he makes explicit and intelligible statements.

But the Church of Zechariah's time was immature, and the events among which he lived were only the prelude and preparation for the far greater events which were to signalise the Church's maturity; and as the prophet looked forward to the triumph of his people over present misfortunes he could not fail to catch a glimpse of the perfect triumphs which were destined to be won by the perfected Church. Under the forms and appearances present to any one generation there lay truths and principles common to all generations. The Temple was the then-existing form of God's dwelling-place, the temporary expedient for Divine manifestation; but in all generations there is a manifestation of God, though not always a stone temple. And so round the whole circle of things with which God's people had to do. Through those things the prophets were, by God's inspiration, enabled to see the per-

manent principles which operated in them, and in speaking of the visible and familiar objects they therefore often used language which was verified not in those very objects and events then present, but only in the ultimate, highest forms which those principles and ideas were to assume.

The comprehensive promise which seemed to augur all good to Jerusalem in Zechariah's time was this: 'I will dwell in the midst of thee.' Beyond this, indeed, no promise can at any time go. If God dwells with us because He loves us and seeks our presence, this implies that all good will be ours. Only the most unreasonable of the Jews could have said within themselves: 'God must do more than this. This will not bring us the substantial benefits we need.' What can God do more than come and share with us? What else can He promise in order to encourage us? What more can He do than bring Himself? And if it would have been unreasonable in the

Jews to murmur, what must we say of murmuring now after the promise has been fulfilled in a manner which beforehand none could dare to anticipate? Are we to live as if this promise were yet unfulfilled? Are we to make no response, no acknowledgment? Is the fact of His Presence to excite no hope, no ambition, no craving for the Divine? Are we to go on through life practically saying: 'What about it; what though God does love me? It is nothing to me though His love for me does draw Him to live with me.' If so, we wait in vain for any more encouraging fact to enter our life. In this alone have we all that we need to balance and guide our life. To live as in a world from which God can never pass away, this is the key to happiness and energy.

CHAPTER II

THE FOURTH VISION

(Zech. iii.)

THE object of the fourth vision which was seen by Zechariah was to restore the confidence of the people in the priesthood and its ministry. In commencing to rebuild the Temple the people naturally felt some doubt whether it was any use doing so. A temple without an inhabiting God is a mockery. No doubt the preceding vision had contained the promise, 'I will dwell in the midst of thee.' But they needed a further assurance. They knew that they had sinned, and that their priests had sinned with them. They felt the justice of Ezekiel's words (xxii. 26), 'Her priests have violated My law and have profaned My holy things'; and they were not sure how the services of these priests would be

received by their holy God. In this feeling of doubt which prevailed among the people the vision finds its starting-point. Joshua the High Priest is seen standing as the people's representative before the Lord ; and the guilty fears of the people find a mouth-piece in Satan, who resists Joshua's intercession on the ground of the past transgressions of the people. This scene in the presence-chamber of Jehovah was the picture sketched by the conscience-stricken fancy of the thoughtful Jews ; and the vision was designed to remove their fears by showing that the sin borne by Joshua as their representative was removed, his ministry accepted, and the priesthood established anew. His filthy garments were removed, the mitre placed on his head, and explicit assurances added that he was accepted as ruler in God's house.

This apparently might have closed the vision ; but God's graciousness overflows, not only scattering the fears of the people

and reinstating the High Priest, but using the opportunity to promise further favours to the people. The 'Branch' had now become a recognised title of the Messiah, and the promise of His coming is here renewed. And to this promise is added one which to us is obscure, but which no doubt was easily intelligible when first uttered. 'For behold the stone which I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone seven eyes; behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts.' The stone spoken of was one which the people had seen lying before Joshua, perhaps the foundation-stone which had been laid immediately after their return, perhaps a stone still in the hewer's shed, selected for its dimensions or designed by its carving to be the topstone of the building. The 'seven eyes' are in the next chapter interpreted as 'the eyes of the Lord which run to and fro through the whole earth,' and must therefore symbolise the providence or watch-

ful care of God. This care was to be displayed in connection with the stone; God Himself was to carve it, was to defend and uphold it as if it were His own handiwork.

This vision is full of permanent instruction. It can indeed bring encouragement or even interest only to those who have some anxiety about the reception their services are likely to meet with. But as it was no empty dream of an excited timidity which represented to the Jews their High Priest in filthy garments, so it may be expected that similar anxieties may be generated now by the reflection of common sense and by a truthful conscience.

The figure here used to represent the effect of sin upon us tells its own tale. Filthy garments make a man unpleasant company; they make him offensive and disgusting, perhaps contagious, to others; and if he has not lost all sense of decency they are to himself a source of constant shame and discomfort. However anxious we may be to be hospit-

able and friendly, we cannot sit at table nor spend hours and days in the close society of one whose clothes and person are justly termed 'filthy.' It is easy to overcome, or at least it is possible to overcome, the revulsion and nausea produced by the disagreeable concomitants of certain diseases; for here pity and necessity take the part of the unhappy sufferer; but where the filthiness is not the unavoidable result of disease, but the result of mere carelessness and low habits and contentment with dirt, it forms an insuperable barrier to intercourse.

This vision says that sin forms a similar barrier to intercourse with God. God will not, cannot, ought not to, find pleasure in intercourse with those who are stained with sin. Possibly we have ourselves met with persons whose conversation was so foul or whose habits were of such a kind that we felt we could not remain in their company. We have learnt that certain sins are

disgusting even to ourselves. The ancient Germans used to punish certain criminals by sinking them under a wicker crate in a mud-hole, recognising that in certain sins there is a foulness deserving a foul death ; a defilement which men cannot stand and must avenge by a death and burial out of sight in one. And if we see nothing in ourselves which could reasonably be supposed to excite similar feelings in a perfectly pure mind such as that of God, it may be feared that this can only be because we have not the keen spiritual discernment of the prophet. This is a theme for the individual conscience ; it is for each to look upon God as He is here depicted, not angry, not taking vengeance, but compelled to turn away from us. Men ought not to be encouraged to believe that good and evil are much the same to God. It is the hope of the world that righteousness will one day prevail, and this hope has for its foundation the fact that God abominates all sin.

The cleansing of Joshua is effected by God. Joshua is helpless. He has no better garments to clothe himself in. Had he had clean raiment, he would have put it on before appearing in God's presence. He appears as he is, because he can do no better. It lies with God to take action regarding his unseemly condition ; either, as Satan recommends, by refusing to have any dealings with one in such a state, or by making him fit for the Divine presence and favours. God adopts the latter course.

But what is it in sin that can be thus, suddenly and by another, removed from the sinner? Obviously, our guilt may thus be removed by a simple act of pardon. This God can at any time grant. When we have wronged another person, it lies with that person to forgive us. We may try to forgive ourselves, and may persuade ourselves the injury was slight or done without malice, but this does not prevent the injured person from refusing forgiveness

and taking us to law. Our friends may forgive us, but until the injured party forgives us we are not clear. This forgiveness may be granted by a word. It calls for no long process. And thus our guilt as transgressors of God's law may at any time be removed by a momentary act of God.

But that which defiles us in God's sight is not only our guilt. We have not only laid ourselves open to punishment, but we have given harbour to wicked imaginings, and we find in our hearts evil propensities and dispositions which excite loathing even in ourselves. These defile us, and make it impossible that a pure God should find pleasure in intercourse with us. A criminal at the bar may be acquitted, and may walk out of court free; but he may, as he goes, use such language regarding the trial, the judges, the crime and his acquittal, as fills us with a deeper loathing of his character than if he had been convicted. Can, then, the

forgiveness pronounced by God be thus dissociated from inward purity? or does this change of raiment include inward cleansing as well as the removal of guilt?

Now the answer is obvious when we consider that the one condition on which we receive forgiveness is that we desire it. Joshua did not provide the clean raiment, nor did he put it on; but he came into God's presence seeking His favour. And this carries with it a great deal. It is the man who wishes forgiveness who gets it. God does not bestow it on us all. He does not scatter it blindfold and indiscriminately. He grants it to the man who feels that above all else he must be reconciled to God. The man who merely fears consequences may not be pardoned; but certainly every man who thirsts for God, and cannot live under His frown, every man who sincerely seeks friendship with God, receives God's forgiveness. But this craving for God's love, this feeling that life is lonely and

soulless and vain without God, this thirst which only reconciliation with God and a sense of His love can quench, implies that the love of sin has got its deathblow in us, and that violently as it may struggle and hideous as may be its contortions, a stronger power has entered us and will at last prevail. Where God sees love for Himself He sees the root of all purity. In every heart that craves His pardon because it prizes His favour He sees a cleansing power that will gradually assert itself throughout our whole nature, and leave no spot nor stain upon us.

Forgiveness, then, though it cannot be earned by us, and though it is the act of another, implies that we are in a certain state of mind. Forgiveness is never a merely external and superficial thing, but it involves the supposition that we are seeking with our whole heart the favour of a holy God. Forgiven persons are therefore persons who already have the root of all good

in them, whose tastes have now a purifying element in them, who are clean because they love God—in a shamefully small degree it may be as yet, but if that love has even found a root for itself in their heart, it will grow and ultimately rule.

More than this the fresh clean raiment given in exchange of the filthy garments can hardly mean. Yet more than this we naturally crave. We may be freed from guilt, from liability to punishment, and we may have present purity of purpose and of inclination; but there remains the painful remembrance of past defilement. Life as it passes leaves indelible traces. It writes itself even on the features of the face. Suffering does so. There are faces you cannot look at without thinking of the long experience of bodily pain or mental anxiety or bereavement which has ploughed those furrows in them. Trace one of those furrows back to its first beginnings, and what a continuance of suffering must you

pass through. And so it is with vice. It writes itself on the face ; and if you would account for that shamefaced look, that wandering averted eye, that loose mouth or bloated face, that hard, cruel expression, you must pass through a long series of sins that have stained all the past, hardening the once reluctant and compunctious sinner into a reckless profligate, wearing out all strength of will by self-indulgence, and narrowing the spirit till nothing but what is sordid and petty can find a place in it.

And deeper than the features of the face has the past written itself upon us. God assures us we are forgiven, and we believe Him ; but no assurance can make us forget what we have done and what we have been. Nor can any present freedom from actual transgression, nor any present superiority to inward evil, make us satisfied with our past. On the contrary, the more entirely we are possessed by right ideas and right feelings, the more

thoroughly hateful do we seem to ourselves to have been. And as we begin to estimate more justly the true character of our past life, the remembrance of it becomes intolerable. The higher we rise above our past the more clearly do we see its proportions and true bearings. The more entirely dissociated from it in spirit we become, the more keenly do we feel its inexhaustible malignity. Let any man give free play to his memory, and let conscience travel through the contents of that memory and pronounce upon them; let him fairly weigh and consider his selfish actions, the cruelty and meanness of them; let him consider his love of pleasure, the vileness and wrong-doing it has led him into; let him think of the persons he has been connected with and had to do with, how many grave injustices he has unwittingly done them, how he has let their interests suffer that his own might thrive, how intercourse with him has lowered

their spiritual tone or even stained them with dark sin, on what a low level he has lived, and what poor and often vile purposes he has harboured ; let him lay out his whole life before him and pronounce upon it as if it were the life of another, and he will feel that until that past be somehow wiped out he must be pursued by feelings of the profoundest regret and shame, if not of self-loathing.

But what is to deliver us from this memory ? Are we to forget in heaven, if not in this life, what we have here been ? Are we to engage so actively and constantly in present duties that the past shall find no opening to intrude itself ? We have no right to forget. We have no right to banish from our minds those who are, for all we know, still and for ever suffering from the results of our sin. We have no right to turn aside from the evil we have done. It is part of the work of grace to shed a strong light upon our life and to disclose to us its

actual colours and proportions. And it is only the weakness of a shallow nature or the artifice of a self-indulgent temperament to treat the evil we have done as if it were not and had never been. It is difficult to see how even in eternity peace of mind can be perfect. Reparation may be made, the actual injuries we have done may be amended, but nothing can obliterate the fact that we did these wrongs, and apparently we must for ever live under the shame and regret that must and ought to accompany memories such as ours. Nothing that can now be done can make it cease to be true that we have proved ourselves selfish, cruelly thoughtless, shameful and vile transgressors. The deep abasement which possesses us in our moments of clearest insight must, for all that we can see, possess us in eternity as well. Part of the equipment of a perfected soul must be a perfect candour which can look steadily at the actual state of matters, and a perfect

justice which will strongly condemn and bewail wrong-doing.

How then can we promise ourselves happiness if these memories are to continue with us? Would not many of us almost prefer annihilation to the prospect of living for ever with a constantly-increasing sense of the natural weakness and hatefulness of our character? If every increase to our moral stature and all improvement in our spiritual health must give us a deepening conviction of our own depravity, is not this too painful a price to pay? How many of us can remember hours when we were almost maddened by the thought of our own folly and wickedness, when we went for days and weeks with all life made dark and desperate to us through the consciousness of our own sin. If such hours are to become more frequent, how can eternity be tolerable, not to say happy?

It may be replied that we should in the first place be content with our prospects if we can look for-

ward to an amended life in which we shall have ample opportunity to give proof that we no longer are what we once were. The shame and burden of the past may to many seem quite incompatible with happiness ; they may feel convinced that a memory such as they bear carries misery with it inseparably ; they may question whether it would not be more satisfactory to cease altogether than to live on so burdened and embittered. Still even such persons must acknowledge that the worthier part to choose is to live on, seeking to do good as formerly we have done evil, gladly accepting a life which gives promise of good. Ashamed and cut to the heart we may be with the memory of the past ; for all that we can see, our happiness must be dimmed and disturbed, but our happiness is not the first consideration, and ends even more to be desired may yet be achieved by us.

And if memory cannot ever be emptied of its contents, and if there is nothing that can sweeten

these contents and make them other than most bitter to us, there is at least a present purity to be found in Christ. 'Now ye are clean,' He says to His disciples, 'through the word that I have spoken unto you.' Seeking in integrity of heart to be conformed to the best we know, resolutely turning away from all evil and setting our faces honestly towards what is perfectly pleasing to God, we are filled with the peace and joy that reconciliation to God and purity of conscience bring. Present purity of conscience only in part effaces the shameful past, but if it is all that in the nature of things can be accomplished, we rest satisfied with this and breathe a new air, the air of an emancipated and hopeful life.

The reason assigned by God for dismissing Satan's accusation of Joshua has caught the ear and the heart and has become one of the most familiar quotations from this book: 'Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?' Arising like other proverbial expressions

from the colloquial speech of the people, it vividly depicts the eagerness with which a valuable is snatched from imminent destruction, as a man snatches from the fire the bank-note he had thought was a piece of waste paper, or the letter from which he had forgotten to copy an address or an expression. In every such case it is obvious that the rescued article has a special value to the rescuer, and is reserved for some further use. The marks of burning, the unsightly blackened edges, the portions awanting, the ruined and wrecked look of the remaining fragment, tell us not only of the narrow escape and not at all of the worthlessness of the article, but rather of its worth to him who interposed to rescue it from the flames. It tells us of some purpose the owner means it yet to serve. So here Satan's malignant exposure of the marks of fire on Joshua is out of place. 'Why is he here at all?' says the Lord. 'Is it not because I have chosen and rescued him, charred as he is,

that he may serve My purposes? I have chosen Jerusalem.'

This then is the conclusion we are to draw if, in surveying our past life, we cannot but be struck with the narrowness of our escape from certain dangers. We see that in many instances things were not allowed to run on to their natural issues with us, but that we were snatched from consequences which destroyed other men. Blackened by the smoke, charred by the fire we were, but not consumed. We formed habits or we were forming habits which we know have destroyed others. We ventured upon practices or single acts which in many cases known to ourselves have produced the most disastrous results. As young men we formed companionships which commonly end in social disgrace, moral degradation, and a wasted life. In others we have seen the terrible consequences which often flow from one mistake, from one unguarded action, from a single day's folly, from the reckless passion of an

hour; we have been guilty of similar carelessness, and yet have only partially felt the consequences. We have been charred but not consumed.

Most thankful should he be who has thus been rescued. It is true, he finds he is not the man he was. He is to a greater or less extent a wreck. He has introduced into his character weaknesses which pain and shame him all his days. He has memories which now and again sting him. He cannot live the strong, straightforward, fearless life of the innocent. In every part of his life he meets the stain of his sin. But when he is dismayed by these traces of the past, when he finds with what disadvantages he has weighted himself, when he recognises how much of life he has shut himself out from, and how many pure and high enjoyments he is now incapable of, and how many of the highest parts in life he can never play; when he sees that he is half-consumed and the remainder blackened and crumbling, he

must yet recognise in the very fact of his rescue evidence that God designs him yet for some good purpose. When tempted to put away all hope, he must listen to the voice of this vision rebuking his accuser : 'The Lord that hath chosen him rebuke thee, O Satan ; is he not a brand plucked from the burning ?'

CHAPTER III

VISION OF THE CANDLESTICK

(Zech. iv.)

THE preceding vision was meant to convey to the Jews the assurance that their high priest Joshua was reinstated as the religious head of the nation; this vision was meant to give a similar assurance regarding Zerubbabel, their civil head. The people might well be in doubt and despondency regarding him. He was apparently no David. He was not the man for a great emergency, however he might have acquitted himself in quiet times as a kind of lay figure on a throne. Born a captive, the son of a captive, he seemed to have inherited or acquired something of the craven spirit of the slave. He had a great opportunity, such an opportunity as enables a man of force to make a mark in history, but

the opportunity was too great for one of his calibre. And naturally enough his own feeling of insufficiency infected the people with timidity and doubtfulness. They began to wonder whether he was recognised by God as David's heir; whether they could ever prosper under him. The Persian monarch had recognised his rank, but would God any longer make use of David's line as a channel of blessing to men, after the kings of Judah had so shamefully abused their position? As yet no success had attended his efforts. For nearly twenty years he had been baffled even in his attempt to build the Temple. Ought not this to be interpreted as meaning that God had disowned him?

In these circumstances this vision is given to Zechariah that Zerubbabel and the people may receive the assurance that he is as truly God's anointed king, endowed with power from God to do His work, as ever any of his forefathers had been. This assur-

ance is conveyed in a twofold form, by word and by vision.

In express terms Zechariah is assured that failure and impotence would not throughout characterise the government of Zerubbabel. What he had begun, he would also finish. The great and central task of rebuilding the Temple would be accomplished. 'The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundations of this house; his hands shall also finish it.' The stone destined to top and complete the building, and which had probably been lying for years in the hewer's shed, would at last be brought forth with shouts of triumph both from the builders and the assembled crowds. The enthusiasm of the people would be kindled by seeing their old temple restored, their fears would all be forgotten, and the air would ring with invocations of blessing. This enthusiasm would culminate when Zerubbabel, with plummet and square, trowel and mallet, fixed in its place the topstone, and prayed that the seven eyes,

representing God's perfect providence, would watch over it.

This carried with it a rebuke to those who, as the prophet says, 'despised the day of small things,' the people who cannot believe that a seed will ever become a tree. The old men who had seen the former temple were not slow to show their contempt for the new building. With the pardonable admiration of the institutions and ways of their youth which characterises old men, they tottered round among the builders and told them what a different kind of look things had when they were young. They wept over the fallen state of the Temple. But their weeping was ill-timed, inconsiderate, and disheartening. The confidence of youth is often blamed, but it is needed to bear up against the depreciation of the present which is dinned into their ears by those who can see no good in anything but that in which they were the chief actors. But to despise the day of small things is to secure

that we shall never glory in a day of great things. For the path to what is great lies through what is small. We ourselves do not come into the world full-grown; neither does anything else. It is God's law to produce great things by degrees, by growth from what is small. And if we throw away the seed because it is so small, and decline to have anything to do with what is not great and conspicuous, we lose our opportunity. It is by doing the little things that lie to our hand that we sow for ourselves all that is greatest and happiest in eternity. 'He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much'; and will have opportunity of showing it.

These assurances were embodied in a vision full of instruction for all time. Among the various appointments of the original Tabernacle constructed by Moses, a conspicuous place was given to a massive lampstand, which had seven lamps, not branching out horizontally, but rising in one perpendicular plane.

The sanctuary was a tent without windows, and light was required. But the purpose of the candlestick was not solely to give light. Like everything else in the Tabernacle it was symbolical. And it is not difficult to discern what it was meant to symbolise. Light is the natural emblem of knowledge. We speak of the mind being enlightened or illuminated. As it is light which enables the bodily eye to see things clearly, so it is knowledge or information which enables the mind to apprehend things. The light which filled the Tabernacle or house of God was symbolical of the knowledge of God. And as this knowledge of God is maintained in the world by the instrumentality of the Church, the Church is symbolised by the candlestick which serves to hold the lights. When John in the Apocalypse saw a vision with similar symbolism, it was thus interpreted to him: 'the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.' It is the Church which by its

purity of life and teaching is to impart to men the knowledge of God.

But whence is this light derived? The light which illuminated the Tabernacle was not a natural but an artificial light, fed by an oil for which the prescription was given from above, and which it was sacrilege to use for ordinary purposes. And this was plainly meant to convey the idea that the light which served to carry on God's service was a light fed from a supernatural source. Some free-thinking Jew might with much plausibility have said, Why should not God be worshipped under the glorious canopy of heaven with the brilliance of His own sun to symbolise the clear light that He delights in? why are we to worship Him in a close stifling tent into which no sun ever penetrates, and which must be illumined by a hot artificial light? Let us come out into the free air of heaven and worship God as He is revealed in nature. But those who saw more

deeply would say, The sun, just because its light is a part of our natural inheritance, is not an adequate symbol of a light which certainly does not shine upon all men alike. It is not that order of nature in which all men live that teaches them to know God. Nature misleads quite as often as it suggests right views of God. We see in nature what might well make us think of God as either impotent or cruel. 'I have long ago found out,' says a recent student of nature, 'how little I can discover about God's absolute love or absolute righteousness from a universe in which everything is eternally eating everything else. . . . Infinite creative fancy it reveals, but nothing else.' It is with a sense of unutterable satisfaction we turn from nature to Him who says, 'I am the Light of the world.' And it is because there is in Christ that which human nature, as we know it, could not have produced, that He is a light to men. It is not a natural but an artificial and

supernatural light which best symbolises that which brings to us the power of seeing God.

To a Jewish mind, then, filled with this symbolism, the vision of the candlestick with its lights fed from a sufficient source signified that the Church of God was still to be maintained in full efficiency, and was to prove a light to the world and a glory to God. When Zechariah walked about the ruined town; when he saw the empty houses with grass growing in the doorways and birds nesting in the best rooms; when he saw the blackened walls of the old temple, and the new walls barely above ground and left now for years without a stone added, pools of water where the altar should have stood, and the wind blowing through the space which the holy of holies should occupy, he might well think the glory was for ever departed, that the Church of God had proved a failure, that there was no revelation, no care of God for men, no true knowledge of the unseen, but each man left to guess

as he could and worship what he pleased. But when he saw this clear waking vision of the golden candlestick in all its former splendour, the persuasion was ineradicably wrought in his mind that this vision was from God, and that God therefore saw no reason to despair of His Church, but was even now providing for its re-establishment in all its former glory. Zechariah had shared in the prevailing despondency. He did not see what good could be accomplished by men of so little pith as Zerubbabel and the rest. He saw how easily they had been cowed by the Samaritans. He had watched them narrowly for years; he had taken their measure, and he despaired of them as the root or beginning of any noble undertaking or any fruitful work. Such men could never shine as lights in the world. Such feeble, incompetent persons could only bring disgrace upon religion.

But it was now made clear to Zechariah's mind that he had been wrong, not perhaps in his judg-

ment of his contemporaries, but in forgetting one Contemporary of whom he had made no account. 'Not by might, nor by power'—so far he was right, there was neither might nor power—'but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.' He is reminded of the source of the Church's light, and it is revealed to him that the oil which feeds this light—the Spirit, that is, which produces right action and God-glorifying results in men—flows from an inexhaustible source beyond the light itself; so that you cannot ever measure the light by looking at the wick or at the amount of oil each bowl can contain, but only by looking at the source whence the oil is supplied. Now, in this vision, with immense significance, the oil was seen to be derived from two *living* olive-trees growing beside the candlestick—obviously to teach Zechariah that though the bowls might be very small, the supply out of which the bowls could be refilled was inexhaustibly large, a living fountain of oil.

To complete the vision another essential feature was added. The prophet's attention is directed to two tubes or spouts which communicate between the trees and the lamp-bowls, and are said to be the two 'oily ones,' or 'sons of oil,' that stand by the Lord of the whole earth. To a mind like Zechariah's, living in a world of symbol, these sons of oil would at once suggest the two great offices to which men were consecrated by anointing, the kingly and the priestly. These offices were at present in a depressed and despised condition, but assurance was now given that God still held them in honour, and would through them communicate to men all that was needed for a brilliantly effective and exemplary life. Joshua, the high priest, and Zerubbabel, the king, in the exercise of their high and influential functions would still be the medium through which God would bring Himself into human life.

The translation of this vision

into terms which show how closely it concerns ourselves is no difficult task. We need the vision as much as Zechariah needed it. There is much open to our consideration which tends to suggest thoughts as gloomy as those which darkened the hopes of Zechariah. Learning as we do to take our own measure, we become convinced of our littleness, of our incapacity to shine, our inability to remove ignorance, our helplessness in presence of surrounding and oppressive darkness. We live alongside of persons whose vices are quite well known to us, and they seem in no way the better for us, in no way struck by our virtues. We recognise that if the remainder of our life is to be as defective in high motive and as unprofitable in result as the past has been, the image of a brilliant light is no fit image for our life. The world derides the pretensions of the Church, makes merry over her decay, mocks her small achievements; and however un-

reasonable it is to do so, it is still possible.

When discouraged by the ridicule or silent contempt of men, when we see how little they take the Church's force into account, when it is treated as Greece or Montenegro is treated by the first-rate powers of Europe, and when, worst of all, we become profoundly convinced of our blundering methods, of our beating the air, of the feeble and inefficient assaults we make upon the dense masses of evil around us, of our waste of time in polishing and adorning weapons which are then carefully hung up as trophies and are never used in actual warfare, when saddened and disheartened by our own incompetence and futility, this vision recalls us to a reasonable ground for more hopeful thoughts. For all the work required from us there is an unfailing supply of grace. It is not the lamp that has to produce the oil ; it has not to make the most of one supply, but there is a constant flow into

it from without. And we are not called upon to create a holy spirit for ourselves, nor have we to maintain a loving and serviceable disposition upon the unused drops of past experience which may yet be squeezed out by a lively memory. Holiness sufficient for all moral beings exists in God. There is that in Him which can sustain in goodness the spirit of each. The Holy Spirit is equal to all demands that can be made upon Him. The Holy Spirit is God ; so that as there is in God life enough for all creatures, a strength sufficient to maintain in being all that is, so there is in God a holiness sufficient for the need of all. There is strength and grace enough in God to carry through the whole work that this world requires. In God there is patience, love, wisdom, sacrifice ; in a word, goodness enough for the overcoming of all evil. And this goodness is communicable.

This goodness is communicable, and it is through Christ it is com-

municated. When we translate into New Testament language what Zechariah says of the 'oily ones,' we gather that the Church now is supplied with oil to burn and shine withal through the kingly and priestly offices of Christ. And translating this technical language again into the language of living fact, we are brought face to face with the truth that each man receives the spirit of Christ and is enabled to live as Christ lived in the service of men and to the glory of God, in so far as he submits himself to Christ's rule and is truly reconciled to God through Christ. The lights of the vision burned brightly when the tubes connecting them with the olive-trees were kept clear and clean; and we receive spirit enough for all that is required of us when we practically recognise Christ as our King and Priest, when we keep ourselves in a real and spiritual connection with Him. If we wish to shine so as to help and guide others, if we see the need of being and doing more than hitherto,

then what we must in the first place do, is to allow ourselves to be so swayed by Christ as to be drawn into true sympathy with the Father and to be possessed by Christ's views of life and by His disposition. In point of fact it is thus we receive the Spirit of God. Let a man recognise what life is given him for, let him recognise how far short his life has been from accomplishing the great objects of life, let him in the shame of having been found unworthy of the trust God has given him and in the consciousness of having defiled and unfitted himself for God's service, turn to God for pardon, cleansing, and strength; let him see the possibilities of good that remain to him, let the idea of a life spent for God and for good possess him, and let him believe Christ's offer to give him such a life; and that man will receive the very strength he needs and will yet shine with the light of Christ.

We may use this subject then, first, for rebuke, and secondly, for

encouragement. It is for our rebuke, when we despair of success in any good project; when in view of our own deficiencies we reckon on failure even at the very time when we seem to be aiming at success. Indolence, timidity, unbelief, selfishness, all shelter themselves under this acknowledged inability. There are malingerers in every good work as well as in war. We see well enough what needs to be done, but we are not the people to do it. We have not position, we have not means, we have not mental capacity, we have not stability of purpose, we have not presence of mind, we have not readiness of speech, we have not health, we have not ability to organise. We look in despair at the deep-seated sores of society and, for all that we do, these sores may deepen daily. It is a pity things are as they are; it is a pity so many in this prosperous land should starve, should grow up knowing nothing but vice; the biggest problems of a healthy

social state have yet to be solved; but what can *we* do? Our whole past life tells us we are feeble. 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit,' this is the uniform answer to all such apologies, which the Lord of hosts gives.

There is also encouragement in the vision. God is our unfailing source of grace. What is right to be done and ought to be done, God has provided us with the means of doing. He does not expect lamps to burn without oil. He sends none of us a-warring on his own charges. If it is our duty to do good, then we can do it, for God is with us a living source of good purpose and of perseverance. Many need this encouragement. There are those who singly or in combination are engaged in some labour or enterprise, whose object it is, not to make money nor to bring themselves into good repute, but to improve the character or condition of some of their fellow-citizens. Such persons cannot forecast the

future without foreseeing serious obstacles, prejudices, counter-interests, selfish contentment with things as they are, 'the blind opposition of the ignorant, the bitter opposition of the vicious'; and above all they foresee the probability of their own patience failing, or of their wisdom proving insufficient. Or there are parents who are perplexed by the way their children are growing up; they feel the extreme difficulty of influencing them as they would wish, the impossibility of securing that they shall turn out just as they would desire. Or there are persons whose domestic life has long been of a distressing kind, and who are always looking forward to the time when at length their temper must give way, their forbearance come to an end, their determination to live on the highest principles fail them. To such persons this vision says: There is no necessity for any such spiritual catastrophe; there will always be grace enough for you. It may be through

weariness and pain, through disappointment and anxiety your path is to lie, but through it all you can come victorious. Provision sufficient is already made for you. All of us, looking forward and seeing how much we have to pass through before our probation is over, recognising what an unlimited capacity for blundering and evil-doing there is in us, may very naturally fear that we shall yet do more harm than good in the world, and permanently injure those whom we fain would help. To us all comes this serious assurance that nothing will be required of us for which strength will not be given ; that between us and the inexhaustible spring of goodness there is an open communication ; that if it is impossible for God to fail in goodness of will and of energy, it is as impossible that He should withhold the communication of this goodness from any one who is confronted by duty and who is willing to fulfil God's purposes by using God's help.

That there is an ever springing source of goodness, an ever renewed supply of moral life, this is the gladdening truth the vision calls us to remember. There is, we know, a sufficient source of physical life which upholds the universe and is not burdened; which continually, in every place, and exuberantly, brings forth life in inconceivably various forms; a source of life which seems rather to grow and expand than to be wearied. So there is a source of spiritual life, a force sufficient to uphold us all in righteousness of life and in eternal vigour of spirit; a force which to all eternity can give birth to new and varied forms of heroic, godly, and holy living; a force ever pressing forwards to find utterance and expression through all moral beings, and capable of making every human action as perfect, as beautiful, and infinitely more significant than the forms of physical life we see around us. If the flowers profusely scattered by every wayside are perfect in

beauty, if the frame and constitution of man and of the animals are continually surprising us by some newly discovered and exquisite arrangement of parts, we may reasonably suppose that there is as rich a fountain of moral and spiritual life. Nay, 'the youths shall faint and be weary,'—the physical life shall fail,—'but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not weary; and they shall walk and not faint.'

CHAPTER IV

THE FLYING ROLL AND THE EPHAH

(Zech. v.)

THE preceding visions have given to Zechariah and the people assurance that the Temple and city shall be rebuilt ; that the old offices which had formerly secured the well-being of Israel should again be established ; that a new era in Church and State was opening under the good guidance of God. There was promise given of a perfectly organised community. Was this not enough? Alas, no! The sickening thought must at once have arisen in the Prophet's mind, What can even this avail so long as the people are what they are? Build a house with every appliance for comfort, finish it in the best style, and then invite into it a family that has been used to a hovel, and

your fine house will soon be filthy and uninhabitable. Put a foolish, incompetent, pleasure-seeking lad into a flourishing business, and he will soon bring it down to his own level, and wreck both it and himself. God makes a heaven for us, but by our very entrance into it we make it a hell. So, thinks the prophet, here is a land restored to us, a land in which we are to have every advantage, in which our civil government and our religious institutions are to be simply the form in which God's presence and care for us are manifested ; but what avails all this, if the people remain just what they were before God swept them out of their land ? This thought of the Prophet, these visions are sent to meet or to anticipate. For they assure him that the land shall be purged of sin and evil-doers.

The form in which this was announced to Zechariah was peculiar and not at first sight easily intelligible. The Prophet saw what he took to be a huge sheet of parchment, such as the

law was written on, flying through the air; and this was explained to be the curse sent forth by God against thieves and perjured persons. It was in the form of a writing, to denote that it was deliberately uttered and would stand. It was thirty feet by fifteen, probably to convey the impression that a large number of sins and curses were specified in it. It was flying, as if hovering like a bird of prey, or sweeping over the land unhindered in its pursuit of its object. It was to drive forth or purge out from the land every sinner specified on the one side of it or on the other—thief or liar. And it was to come into the house of the offender, and like a pestilence, a dry rot, or a fire, it was utterly to consume the very fabric of his home, so that he should be quite blotted out. That is to say, the community was to be cleansed by the destruction of individuals. In ancient times, when pestilence, bad harvests, reverses in war, fell upon any people, they concluded

that some members of the community had committed flagrant crime, and they set themselves to discover and banish such wrongdoers, and so purify the nation. God here assures the Prophet that He will use this method, that His curse will go forth in a visible form and exterminate the sinners so as to leave the community stainless.

The succeeding vision has a similar meaning. Wickedness in the form of a woman is pressed down into an ephah and held in by a cover of lead, and, like an evil beast in a cage, is hurried away into a godless land and fixed immovably there. It is remarkable, however, that an ephah should be used for conveying her away—not a simple box, not a cage, but a large wooden measure. The ephah may be used here as the symbol of trade and commerce, just as scales or a ship are sometimes used as their emblem now; and it may be intended that the thieving and lying against which the curse was directed were chiefly

to be found among the mercantile men and traders. Or the measure may mean that the wickedness of the people was an ascertained quantity, that all the sins of individuals, the petty cheatings and white lies and equivocations and plausible statements had gone into an accurate standard measure, were counted, weighed, and taken note of. The Prophet could not make out what was in the ephah until the leaden disc was lifted ; then he saw a woman, the personification of wickedness ; wickedness full-grown, seductive, plotting, prolific ; wickedness come to a head, filling up the measure.

Then appeared two winged women who bore away the ephah, rapidly and as it were without effort ; 'the wind was in their wings,' and they sailed on the breeze as large-winged birds do. This was easy to them, for 'they had wings like the wings of the stork,' whose long black wings stretching out from its white body have not only a striking and beautiful effect, but enable it to

soar high and fly immense distances. In its annual migration it covers a longer distance than from Judæa to Shinar.

The first truth, then, which this double vision brings before us is this: that the prosperity of a community, or a happy and thriving social condition, depends not only on outward tokens of God's favour, such as good harvests, freedom from epidemics, successes in war or diplomacy; not only on possessing the best possible form of government and an ecclesiastical condition of which neither radical nor conservative can complain; but also, and mainly, on the sound moral character of the people themselves, on the sense of honour they carry with them into all their dealings, the principle and high tone which characterise their daily life. Church and State may be organised on the best possible principles; Joshua and Zerubabel may both be assured of God's favour, and yet the social condition of the people may be

rotten to the core ; and until the members of the community are men of honesty and good faith, there is no kingdom of God upon earth. It is not by issuing a proclamation at the town-cross, nor by passing one or two new laws, nor by appointing one or two new government officials, nor by a touch or two here and there throughout the land to hide nuisances and abolish old grievances, that a community can be regenerated. No such swift and easy processes are once thought of by God as sufficient. He declares His favour for this land, but does not suppose that thus He will finish all abuses and perfect reform. He immediately follows this up with the most keen-sighted, closely scrutinising investigation, and the most thorough-going treatment of evil-doers in practical matters.

This reminds us in the first place that we may depend too much on well-devised legislation and the machinery of government for the prevention of crime. It

is after all only indirectly that law acts towards the repression of vice. It can directly take cognisance of crime only after it has been committed; and the punishment of the criminal *may* indeed deter others—although in some savage islands where there is no law there is a much greater respect for property than among ourselves. But it is a helpless way of dealing with crime, to deal only with the convicted; to lift up the sword or the lash only after the evil has been done. This surely is to lock the door after the horse is stolen; it is to lay out cemeteries and make provision for the dead by way of preventing disease. And in point of fact no laws, regulations, or supervision will ever prevent dishonesty. You may have admirable machinery, an elaborate system of checks, making fraud immeasurably more difficult, but you must always leave much in the hands of individuals. No system is absolutely self-acting; and wherever you admit a human

hand, you admit the possibility of fraud. You may make it more difficult and more discreditable and perilous for men to cheat you, but you will never make it impossible. Of course it ought to be made difficult. For the sake of the young, and of those who are under great temptation, every obstacle should be laid in the way of dishonesty ; otherwise we tempt men and lead them into needless trials. At the same time men are not machines, and if it were possible to remove all opportunity of fraud, this would merely be equivalent to removing all opportunity for the education of conscience, for the development of trustworthiness and self-control, and that strength of character which comes of keeping one's hands clean where the temptation to soil them has been exceptionally strong. The life of a man in trade or business is eminently fitted to develop, and let us most thankfully acknowledge often does develop, many of the most valuable and admir-

able qualities in human character—a manly patience under reverses, a generous consideration of others in their time of straitened circumstances, ability to face and manage the actual facts and persons which this world presents, and to carry one's self among them guided always by the private voice of conscience, rising superior to public opinion, to prevalent custom, to mere greed, selfishness, and excitement. These are valuable qualities, qualities which are the very salt of our community, but they are qualities not easily arrived at. They are qualities with a history at their back, a history of years of discipline, of evenings and nights of anxious thought, of long periods when the evil suggestion came back in hours of weakness and had to be thrust aside in these times of weakness with pain and difficulty. They are qualities most distinctively and peculiarly moral, the well-deserved result of moral trial, and therefore impossible if the social system were reduced to

a mere machine in which no man could do wrong or turn out a failure.

But under the strain of temptation the double sin of theft and lying is constantly produced. Fraudulent covetousness, underhand selfishness, is still the too common result of the probation which our social condition necessarily institutes. And the curse of God is directed against this double sin, because from its very nature it frequently evades the punishment society would inflict. It is notorious that it is difficult to deal with many forms of fraud as sharply as the public instinct feels they ought to be dealt with. Spectators are filled with burning indignation when they see the far-reaching and long-drawn calamity with which innocent persons are overwhelmed through the preposterous self-confidence and unscrupulous greed of a few men puffed up by commercial vanity or blinded and hardened by insatiable lust of money.

But there is no such thing as

successful sin. In one way or other the sin of the sinner finds him out. And impressive as are the terms in which the curse against such sins is here pronounced, it becomes tenfold more so when interpreted in the light of its fulfilment in actual instances; in which all that a man has built up around himself, and that he has made himself a liar and a thief to secure, is visited with utter and irreparable ruin. There is many a household that can tell you what is meant by these words: 'It shall abide in the midst of his house and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof.' It means that the clever financier is overtaken by reverses which make investigation necessary, and is exposed as foolish, unscrupulous, disreputable. Or it means that the children in whom he used to find comfort, who knew nothing of the stories told of him, and in whose unsuspecting fondness he found relief, now begin to eye him with suspicion, and his home

is consumed around him. And even if outwardly he still prospers, out of his very prosperity the curse of God glares at him with a condemnation he cannot endure.

For though he may baffle the scrutiny of men, he cannot escape the curse which rises in his own conscience and in his own life. This meets him in every room; he is conscious of it as he transacts business with you; it is full before his mind as he talks with you by his fireside; at every turn it stands before him. It is so subtle and impalpable he cannot contend with it; there is nothing he can preserve from its influence; like a relentless creditor it exacts the uttermost farthing; like a fire it passes always to new fuel till all is consumed. It leaves no part of his life in which he can secrete himself and say: I am safe from it here. He sees the whole fabric of his life being destroyed by it and he can do nothing to stay the destruction. There is nothing so substantial as to resist its gnaw-

ing tooth. He feels that it is the hand of God he is fallen into, for he recognises that the curse that consumes him is as just and as omnipresent as God Himself. He learns at last that 'morality is in the nature of things,' and that he who proposes to better himself by fraud is simply proposing to make a new world and a world very different from this. When we begin to feel the reality and penalty of sin, we naturally attempt to excuse ourselves. We begin to wonder whether after all it may not be a mere superstition to be so afraid of sin, whether we were not intended to live freely in youth and comfortably in age according to our likings. But we find that we might as well resent sleeping as an interruption, and strive to do without it; or think eating a mere traditionary custom; nature asserts itself and punishes us quickly. And as certainly, though not always as speedily, does a man receive according to the deeds he has done. He finds that when he breaks a

moral law he makes all nature his enemy.

The grand result, then, which these visions point to is a cleansed land. 'The Banishment of Wickedness' might be affixed to this chapter as its title. In the most graphic form this grand achievement is here set before us. As we represent in our paintings, or on our public buildings, merchandise, music, poetry, or any of the nationalities of the world, in the female form, so here wickedness, represented as a woman, is banished to the land of Shinar, a land fit only for transporting convicts to, a land which represented to the Jewish mind all that was remote, alien, and of bad repute. This, then, is God's purpose. He will banish wickedness. How does this purpose suit our view of the future? Possibly there are other things which we would more gladly see packed up and transported. The claims of Christ and of holiness, in all their inevitable and penetrating omnipresence; the serious responsi-

bilities and far-reaching consequences of life — perhaps some feel that these are their most real burden. Might not some, if they spoke their mind, step forward and say: 'Put my debts thus out of sight, and let them disappear into a far land, and you will do me a substantial kindness.' Or, 'Take my bodily ailments and weaknesses, and give them as real a dismissal, and you show me a vision worth seeing.' 'Take these things, or,' we might even dare to say, 'these persons with whom we have got entangled, and banish them for ever, and our spirit rises to a new life, emancipated and jubilant.' How men daily strive to banish out of sight, to bury under a weighty and immovable cover, things that mar their happiness and make life intolerable. The poor wretch that buries deep the blood-stained knife and clothes that betray him; the man that locks his door and burns to the last letter the tell-tale document; the craven who ships to the Antipodes the partner

of his guilt—these are but types of the eagerness which we all display in ridding ourselves of what we conceive to be hostile to our interests. Are we as eager to see the last of wickedness? Would we view its banishment from the land with something of the feeling with which men saw Napoleon safely put out of the way and removed beyond the possibility of disturbing the peace of Europe? Surely there are many who would do so; who can form to themselves no brighter picture of the future than that here shown us of wickedness borne away; the stork's wings decreasing in the distance, becoming first like gulls, then like swallows, and finally invisible; and men turning then to breathe freely and congratulate one another that now we had seen the last of wickedness; that henceforth there should be no more of those bitterest of all distresses that come through the hard-heartedness of man to man, through lust of pleasure and lust of gold, through envy and ambition and revenge.

And in point of fact this alone can give men a genuine hopefulness about the future. Suppose our own past life were exempt from wickedness and all that wickedness has brought into it, how different and how much happier would it be. Are we not conscious that, were we put back into childhood, there is nothing we should more determinedly aim at than to keep free from the sins we have fallen into? We have a kind of feeling as if without wickedness life would be flat, insipid and wearisome; that if you take away from life all that we need to do on account of the recklessness and sin of other men, and all the excitement of temptation and pleasure of sin in ourselves, you leave nothing but an emptied husk, out of which all the flavour and nutriment have gone. Our own consciousness about the past shows us how contrary to the truth is any such idea; how it is wickedness that at every point, so far from making life brilliant and stimulating, has emptied life

of its strength and sparkle, and has left us but the dead sour lees. We see plainly enough that if wickedness is to continue as dominant in ourselves and in others as it has been, it is a mere pretence at living we can make, and our future is emptied of all solid reality of hope.

Are we then to have no share in this greatest work of cleansing the land? Is it a work we have in view as we come in contact with men in the actual life of this world? Do we seek, let us say quite as much, not to say far more, to purge the actual world of wickedness as to make our own out of it? Does it not strike you as a discreditable style of living, to use men for our own worldly uses and never bring them into contact with anything higher than the world; to employ all the common usages of trade, good and bad, for our own ends, and never seek to improve them? Who can improve society but the men who actually compose it? Who can bring bad custom to an

end but those whose temptation it is to perpetuate them? Where is this purified society God promises to come from but out of actual human society? It is our society made better by ourselves. To wait till society regenerates itself, and till everybody will support you in righteous action and in carrying out your higher views, is unreasonable, you being the salt which is to purify society. If society is not regenerated it is because the individual is not. If we decline to use our influence on that part of society we touch, we, in so far, prevent the possibility of the very thing we profess to be hoping for, the regeneration of society.

It would appear that men live on under the impression that meeting one another, and being mixed up in many transactions here, they must adopt some very questionable ways; but that meeting one another in some other and future life, and being mixed up in far larger and wiser society there, they will find it easy to be

loving, self-sacrificing, generous, upright, bent upon the public good rather than their own. The hollowness of such an expectation, the fatuity of such a conception of the future, has been exposed a thousand times :

‘ No, no ; the energy of life may be
Kept on after the grave, but not begun !
And he who flagg’d not in the earthly
 strife,
From strength to strength advancing—
 only he,
His soul well-knit, and all his battles
 won,
Mounts, and that hardly, to eternal life.’

Is not probity as much your duty to-day as it will be this day a hundred years hence ? Does not God value purity of life in us now as much as He will value it when it may perchance be easier of attainment ?

Still, it may be felt that the extrication of social and business customs from all that is corrupt may be spoken about, but when these customs are practically met with it appears impossible to eliminate their wickedness and banish it. Even though we clearly

see that if we do not live with clean hands in this world there is no great prospect of our doing so anywhere else; though we clearly see that Christ meant to regenerate society upon earth, yet wickedness seems to be so inextricably mixed up with everything that it evades our grasp. It is almost impossible for us to measure the guilt which may attach to customs in which we have been brought up. The fact that they are recognised customs, that intercourse with men and the profits of business almost entirely depend upon them, and such considerations as these, weigh against the apparent fraud that strikes the outsider. But this ephah reminds us that there is a measure for every human transaction, that the precise amount of guilt is ascertainable and ascertained, that each weak connivance with dubious practice, and each bold origination of some new and private path to illegitimate gain, is silently weighed and measured by Him whose eyes are in every

place ; and that, so far from wickedness being inextricable from the ordinary ways and life of men, it can be presented as separable and individual as this woman of the vision, and as if it were merely a partner who had hitherto indeed entered into every concern we have to do with, but with whom partnership may be, and is to be, dissolved. The evils which so darkly blot our social life and customs continue very much from this cause, that we do not resolutely measure the guilt which attaches to the practices we are led into as members of society. We make no resolute effort to judge things for ourselves and to resist being sucked down to much immorality and sin by the current of our profession or trade.

It is an inspiring work to which this vision summons every man, to share in ridding the land of wickedness. The most abundant satisfaction is enjoyed by the man who brings a clear gain to a number of his fellows or saves them from much suffering ; who

leaves behind him something which enters into the life of men, and which permanently helps or strengthens or purifies that life. Great inventions, laws potent for good, decided steps in human progress, are possible only to the few. But to all it is possible definitely to weaken that which lies at the root of all human misery. Is there no grain of wickedness you can cast into the ephah? Is there no rising, resisting, struggling habit that is resolved to be out upon us again, which we can resolutely thrust down and bury under the heavy leaden mass of God's condemnation? Surely when God shows us such a vision, and discloses to us the purposes in which He finds pleasure, there are some who give a serious, thoughtful response, some who say within themselves, 'I will, in the light of God's presence, consider my life, whither its general course tends, what good purpose it can accomplish, and what in me is hindering this good purpose.'

CHAPTER V

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

(Chap. vii., viii.)

FOR two years Zechariah saw no visions. Nothing came into his mind which he could honestly communicate to the people as a fresh word of God. To those who enjoyed his visions and waited for them more impatiently than we wait for an important speech from a leading statesman or a new poem of the Laureate, this was disappointing ; and strong pressure must have been put upon the prophet to discharge his function. Matters were all the while emerging which it was a strong temptation to decide by an oracular utterance. Questions must often have been put to Zechariah concerning affairs of which he had his own private opinion, and he would not have been human had

he never been tempted to utter this as if it were authoritative ; but Zechariah seems to have been an honest man, and a man whose honesty cleared his inward sight so that he could not mistake what was God's voice in him for his own imaginings or opinions. The people must, therefore, have gradually come to understand that prophecy was of no private instigation or the mere imaginings of the individual prophet, but that the prophet was then only a prophet when he spoke as he was moved by the Holy Ghost.

At length, after two years of silence, Zechariah was thus moved to speak. The men of Bethel sent a deputation to Jerusalem to inquire of the priests and prophets whether it was advisable to continue the Fast in the fifth month. This fast had been appointed to commemorate and bewail the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, who in this month 'burnt the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem,

and every great man's house he burnt with fire,' so that from the seventh to the tenth of the month the city was all in flames. It suddenly struck the men of Bethel that this fast was out of place now, when the city and temple were daily assuming more promising proportions. They were intelligent and honest men, who felt that a religious service which did not express present feelings, but was a mere antiquated observance, was worse than useless. At the same time they had too much respect for ecclesiastical authority to take upon themselves to abolish the fast-day. And besides, they had as much patriotic feeling as forbade them to move in this matter irrespective of their fellow-citizens and of the ideas that might prevail in other towns.

The answer to their question expresses some essential principles of religious service: I. That it is reasonable to revise continually all our religious observances, with a view to ascer-

tain if there still remains the same reason for their continuance as there was for their institution. The Jews, in common with Eastern nations generally, were excessively bound by tradition. Yet these men of Bethel suddenly awoke to the absurdity of wearing sackcloth and casting ashes on their heads in mourning for a city which every day was becoming more beautiful and prosperous. They felt that they were false, exhibiting a grief which had long since passed away. The lamentation and confession which were most appropriate while the people were in banishment were out of place now that they were restored to their land. The course of time, the progress of events, had antiquated this fast.

And it is always a reasonable and necessary question to put regarding every religious observance which has had an incidental origin, whether it is not now antiquated and an encumbrance; whether what was most appropriate a hundred years ago is not

inappropriate and mischievous now; whether what God appointed for the last generation He may not desire to abolish in this. In our religious observances there is what is essential and unchangeable. That Christians should meet together to worship the Father and to encourage one another in the faith, that they should celebrate Baptism and the Communion—these are necessities of the Christian life, and are of perpetual obligation. But those observances which at one time did not exist in the Church, but were suggested by some special occasion or particular need or emergency, may become obsolete. The need may pass away, the occasion lose all its urgency by lapse of time, and it is therefore the duty of the Church to inquire and determine whether the observance should or should not be continued. Forms of worship which were adopted during the reaction against Popery become inane when the Church's danger

lies in another direction. Fasts and feasts which were heartily instituted by men whose feeling was stirred by great calamities or by valuable benefits, become meaningless burdens when the events are overlaid by matters of greater present consequence. Revision, therefore, of all observances and forms of worship is one of the standing duties of a Church.

But the men of Bethel must be imitated not only in their inquiry, but in their manner of making it. They recognised the importance of unanimity and of submission to authority. They did not abolish the Fast in Bethel and leave Jerusalem to follow suit. And their moderation was rewarded. They had the satisfaction of carrying the whole Church with them. Moved by two balancing principles, respect for authority and the exercise of private judgment, they proposed their question.

2. The answer they received was not direct. The best answer,

the only sufficient answer, to religious inquiry is often indirect. Men wish for rules; God gives them principles out of which they can frame rules for themselves. Men ask for superficial instruction; God penetrates to the root of their difficulties. In this instance the reply virtually was: 'There is no need of saying *when* you should fast, unless you first of all know what true fasting is. There is no call for any new deliverances on the subject. If you ponder what has already been said by the former prophets, you will be able to determine this point for yourselves.' This is a rebuke administered to the frame of mind that craves special and infallible guidance in matters regarding which the mind of God has already been sufficiently indicated. This frame of mind has two roots. The one is a disinclination to act in the manner which has already been identified as coincident with God's will. Men profess to be seeking for more light; but they

are really seeking for something which may dim and darken the light they have, and allow them to be doubtful whether they should make the sacrifice or do the duty demanded of them. And when in this frame of mind, asking for more light because already they see too clearly for their own comfort what their duty is, they are always unusually sanctimonious, and redundantly rich in religious expressions, and ostentatiously earnest in consulting every one who can advise them. The other root of this disposition is a timorous distrust of one's own judgment. Even in men who have some experience of religion, there remains an unworthy fear of God, which causes them to shrink from carrying out their own conclusions in matters of religion. Men act as if God might be angry with them for using the judgment He Himself has implanted in them, as the chief instrument of their education and progress.

3. The answer to these men of

Bethel cautions us especially against a self-interested observance of religious ordinances. 'When ye fasted and mourned, did ye at all fast unto Me?' Frequently men engage in religious ordinances because they have a dim expectation of some good that is thereby to accrue to them. These observances of theirs are not the spontaneous outpouring of souls that love God, and worship because they are inwardly rapt and adoring. Self-interested worship may be much more elaborate than that of the sincere worshipper. The flatterer who has an end to gain will word his address to you in much more elaborate phrase than the friend who speaks direct from the heart. But of such flattery you say, with God, 'I cannot away with it.' To these men of Bethel, and through them to all formal worshippers, God says: 'Why consult Me about these services? What have I to do with them? It was not Me you had in view, but yourselves, in performing them. If you like

them, continue them. If they are a weariness to you, how much more to Me. So long as you merely wish to please yourselves, or to secure yourselves against some imagined danger, devise whatever services you think will best suit yourselves.'

Our whole idea of religious service, then, is wrong if it proceeds mainly from an expectation that good will thereby accrue to ourselves. If we sing God's praise under the impression that this is required of us and that we must do it, Gods meets us with, 'Who has required this of you?' Nothing can be more intolerable and repulsive to Him than such fictitious homage. What He seeks is the outpouring of the full heart that delights in Him and cannot forbear praising, or at all events finds real satisfaction in doing so. When the worship of God becomes to us a mere duty the performance of which we feel incumbent upon us that we may not lose God's favour; when we enter upon it without

heart, or even with some repugnance or distaste, God cannot recognise that as worship of Him, but only as the service of our own superstitious and ignorant self-seeking. We seek the company of our friends, not that we may ingratiate ourselves with them, but because we are happier there than elsewhere: such is the worship which God delights in.

4. Of fasting itself our ideas are apt to be confused. On the whole we are perhaps too ready to dismiss it as a mere old-fashioned or monkish observance. But certainly, both in the Old and New Testament, some importance is attached to it. And naturally enough, we begin to fear lest in parting with fasting we may also be parting with some spiritual benefits which fasting communicated. Now what fasting does is, first, to bring our acknowledgment of sin, and our humiliation on account of it, into a distinct bodily form. We confess sin not only by word of mouth, but by act, by

abstinence. We allow this fact of our sinfulness to regulate our bodily condition. We take so much account of it, and ascribe so much reality to it, as to allow it to appear in and to sway our outward demeanour. Men who have felt their sin deeply have not taken to fasting as a right thing to do. They have been driven to it. As a heart bleeding from bereavement cannot turn to food as if there were the same charm in living as ever ; so those in whose conscience sin has been asserting its importance, cannot but turn from the world and from their usual pursuits and nourishment in extreme bitterness of spirit. 'My *sin* is ever before me.'

It will, however, be said, 'Well then, let those who are thus driven to fasting, fast, but do not ask it of men who have no such feeling about their sin, who can eat and drink and go about their usual employments with gusto and relish, whose appetite has never been spoiled by sorrow for sin,

whatever else may have interfered with it.' But I am not sure that this is sound reasoning. For even where fasting is not the natural expression of sorrow for sin, it may produce a state of mind in which the evil of sin is more truly appreciated. Many whose natural grief is so slight that it would never dictate to them to clothe themselves in mourning, have their grief increased when they conform to the usual custom. And those whose grief is bitter find it increased by funereal gloom and all the sad appurtenances of woe. So any little grief we have for sin might be materially aided by what has been in some its natural expression.

It is to be feared that at the bottom of the modern shrinking from fasting lies the feeling that to fast for sin is making rather too much of it, and so giving it a prominence and substantial recognition in our lives which is exaggerated and unseemly. We are willing to acknowledge sin

and ask forgiveness, but to prolong our humiliation and allow a spiritual concern to put aside any ordinary arrangement of our life is going too far. If so, it is a most unreasonable superiority with which we presume to look down upon those true souls who have so keenly felt their sin as to mourn for it as truly as ever they grieved over an earthly loss. They were at least in earnest. And whether we fast or fast not, it is essential that we have that genuine grief for sin which in other days produced, and in other men produces, fasting as its natural expression. If we see sin to be the root of evil, this perception will find expression in our lives, if not in fasting, then in some outward result as distinctly perceptible.

But fasting has a second function. It is an unmistakable expression of willingness to abstain from whatever might serve as fuel to sinful passion, and to reduce the spirit to a chastened and humble frame. Paul himself

was careful to 'keep his body under.' So far from allowing it comforts and pampering it with indulgences, he used severity towards it. And when one reads of men who have followed his example, the question always arises: 'Did these men know less about the means of resisting sin than we do, or did they know more of the inveteracy and danger of sin? Were they more ignorant or more in earnest?' This at least was obvious, that they were willing to do what they could towards destroying sin, no matter what uncomfortable lives they had to lead in consequence. They showed a determination to be holy; a determination that the spirit should be the absolute master of the body, and should not be prevented from communing with God even by what might seem the most necessary occupations. And whether by fasting or by other methods, we also must gain this mastery over the body, this superiority to such considerations as the flesh sug-

gests. If we cannot bear to forgo accustomed comforts, if we cannot step aside from familiar ways, if we fear to give the spirit final and complete advantage over the flesh, we have not the temper of those who fast. Yet without this temper we hope in vain for sanctification. Without times of true spiritual exaltation, and of detachment from bodily cravings and appetites, we cannot attain any high measure of holiness. If there is a degree of holiness which we regard with dread as precluding carnal enjoyments, we have not the spirit of those who fast. We are called to be 'saints,' and if we decline to be saints there is no second-rate, inferior calling we can fall back upon. We must learn to find our joy in God if the pleasures of sin are to lose their attraction. If we are to be delivered from dangerous sin, we must be willing to be delivered from all sin. If we are to keep sin out of the life it must be kept out of the heart; and it can be kept out of the heart only by

filling the heart with holy purposes and spiritual desires.

But perhaps the most important truth of all which was elicited by the question from Bethel is that, in common with all religious service, fasting is meaningless and displeasing to God unless accompanied by holiness of life. Zechariah, as well as the older prophets, points out that the truest and most acceptable fast is abstinence from wrong-doing, from oppression of the widow, the fatherless, the stranger, and the poor. If sin makes such an impression on the conscience that the sinner cannot eat, the appropriate result of such impression is in conduct. Lowliness of spirit before God inevitably takes the form of loving and meek demeanour towards men.

Some persons carry this principle to an extreme, and say that all worship should take the form of work, and that apart from active beneficence there is no worship worthy of the name. We best show our worship of God

when we accommodate ourselves to His appointments in life and do our duty where He has set us ; and the Church perfected will be simply a society of men perfectly discharging the duties of their several callings. But this is only half the truth. As God is personal, there must be that interchange of thought and direct expression of feeling which constitute the charm and the strength of all personal intercourse. The good son emphatically utters his reverence and love for his parents while silently toiling for their support : but this reverence and love are sustained by the look of affection, by the loving talk in the evening hour, by direct personal intercourse of one kind or other.

This reply regarding Fasts closes with the assurance that the fasts shall be turned into feasts that days of uninterrupted gladness are approaching, days in which God shall so manifestly bless Israel that all nations shall observe and turn towards Jerusalem. ' Thus saith the Lord of

Hosts: In those days it shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.' This is the ultimate attraction, the presence of God. This gradually approves itself as the most powerful determining influence in the life of nations and of individuals. It is this that secures the well-being and felicity here described. And the prediction that the Divine presence among the Jews would attract men to the race, has been fulfilled so far as the Western world is concerned. It is as manifested in the history of the Jews and in the person of Jesus of Nazareth that God has been recognised and worshipped by Christendom. After all the earnest pondering and anxious inquiry, after all the philosophical and scientific investigation which men have undertaken in every age to find out God, it is still

the skirt of the Jew that forms the most hopeful hold in this great search.

Every one whose thirst for God compels him to meditate on such themes will inevitably ask: 'Why was such special, contrived, supernatural revelation required? Might it not have been expected that above all other equipment of our nature, we should have enjoyed a natural sensitiveness to God's presence and power of distinctly apprehending Him? All men have as their birthright the instincts and faculties which enable them to live a healthy physical life: might it not have been expected that each man should have been furnished by a loving God with the consciousness of His presence and with a clear knowledge of God? Why confine for the longer part of this world's history the knowledge of God to one small, very small, portion of our race?'

The doubts which such questions imply are relieved by several considerations. We are especially

to consider that spiritually we are diseased, and are not in a position to say how distinctly a healthy spiritual nature might testify of God or how clearly it might see and know Him. Our nature has physical appetites which teach us how to maintain ourselves in physical life: but if these appetites are abused they cease to guide us safely. Besides, it is impossible to conceive how God would have revealed His nature and His will regarding us in any other way than through and in human history, culminating in the personal manifestation of Himself in Christ. For this personal manifestation the necessary preliminary was a gradual process of enlightenment, running parallel with a gradual growth of the human capacity for apprehending God and living for Him.

In our own day there is much honest perplexity about God, and one is sometimes tempted to desire a fresh revelation suited to the wants of our time. One always longs for some disclosure

of God which would bring immediate conviction to all men. We cannot learn that spiritual things are spiritually discerned. When we look for God in nature He seems to evade us, and from the personal and responsive Being we look for He seems to become an impersonal force, which is indeed no respecter of persons, and which hears no broken-hearted entreaties. When we look for God within ourselves, we seem at times to see something of a holy Lawgiver who helps those who strive to keep His law ; but there is much also which bids us believe we have to do with a system of nature which somehow favours those who live in the way we call righteous. But in Christ we find one who is as personal as ourselves, and as Divine as we can conceive or as our needs require. In Him we find one whom instinctively we worship ; one able to respond to and satisfy our faith ; the Master of nature, unappalled in presence of its most terrific moods, overcoming its

most overwhelming ills ; one who is transcendent also in the moral world, alone upon earth unsullied by temptation, in the world and yet neither weakened, misled, nor lowered by its tone, and stretching His hand as from a position above all possibility of failure to all who crave His help. Whatever God is, that is God as we have to do with Him, God in human nature revealing Himself personally.

There are indeed those who own no need of a personal God, but find nature enough ; who believe that as by a prudent use of this world our physical life may be enjoyable, so also by using wisely the moral laws which disclose themselves to us we can become all that is morally possible to us. They feel that much that is said of man's need of God arises from a timid selfishness that fears to stand alone, or at all events that it is exaggerated, and that in point of fact men do live happily without recognising God, and that to fear the future is un-

reasonable. But what are we to make of Christ? What is the significance of this unique phenomenon? We feel foolish when we even compare Him with any other man. What then ought a candid man to make of this? What is the *true* account of it—not only the account of it which looks plausible, but that which stands examination? Has not Christ in past ages proved His power to lead men to God, to strengthen the human spirit, to lift men out of what is degrading? Must we not lay hold on the skirt of this Jew if we are to find God and life eternal?

CHAPTER VI

THE SHEPHERD OF ISRAEL

(Chap. xi.)

EVERY reader of this book feels that in passing from the eighth to the ninth chapter he is making a distinctly marked transition to a new kind of writing. The first eight chapters are homogeneous. They have a resemblance to one another, and obviously form one whole; but this continuity is broken by the remainder of the book. It is not only that the style changes, nor only that the interpreting angel who has figured so largely in the first part disappears from the second, in which his services are quite as much needed; but the subject and character of the prophecies alter. In the first eight chapters the references to Zechariah's own time are continual, pointed, and obvious; in the six remaining

chapters there is not one allusion which obviously and without hesitation or dubiety can be referred to contemporary circumstances. In the former part of the book the prophet speaks of the half-built temple, of the gradually extending city, of the measurers, the masons, the stones, and the persons who were visible day by day in the streets of Jerusalem, and which he had only to name to call up the real object before the mind's eye. Every one of his allusions could at once be understood by the men who were then resident in Jerusalem; and all his utterances regarded matters which every one was daily speaking about. But no sooner do we read the first verse of the ninth chapter than we experience a sudden loss of this firm foothold among the well-known events of Zechariah's time. We seem to have made a step off *terra firma* into quaking bog, where we can walk only flounderingly. Up to the ninth chapter we advance in the clearest sunshine. We see

standing out in broad day every person or thing that the prophet has in view. But in chapter ix. we walk into a bank of fog. We hear heavy firing, very heavy firing indeed, but we can only dimly and uncertainly make out the occasion and at whom the guns are directed.

This very marked difference between the first and second parts of this book has led many good men and good critics to conclude that these last chapters were anonymous, and were added to the Book of Zechariah for reasons now unknown—possibly because his book stood at the end of the ‘Prophets,’ and fragments of unknown authorship were naturally appended to it. But the point which is of chief interest is the principle used to determine the date of this or any undated prediction. That principle is, that the prophet is always sent to relieve present anxieties and to guide the people through emergencies which have already arisen. Prophecy, however high and far

it soars in its flight when once begun, has always its starting-point from earth, from a spot within human eyesight and contemporary interest. As the miracles of our Lord had always a practical object in view as their primary end, and only secondarily served an evidential purpose, so had prophecy always in the first place a practical and immediate object to effect. If it can be shown that it deeply concerned one generation of Israel to be made aware of a coming event, and that the knowledge of this event did not at all concern any other generation, this of itself will afford strong presumption that the prophecy which predicts the event in question dates from the generation which behoved to know it.

And the reason why Zechariah's generation is made aware of calamities which were about to fall on neighbouring peoples seems to be disclosed in ix. 8. God's house was being rebuilt by that generation. The people were

spending large sums of money upon it and for its sake were provoking the envy and hostility of their neighbours; and it could scarcely fail to occur to them that all this labour might be in vain. They were a small and weak people and could not expect to cope with such empires as had previously laid their capital in ruins, or with that new Greek power which was already strangling serpents in its cradle. Nothing, then, could be more appropriate than to give to this generation those very assurances which fill the ninth chapter. It is a translation into the concrete and the actual of the word: 'A thousand shall fall at thy side and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee.' The impregnable stronghold of Tyre shall be taken; the proud, unconquered, fierce Philistines will sink before a more unconquerable invader; how, then, shall the weaklings who quail before a few Samaritans stand before such an enemy? 'I will encamp,' says

the Lord, 'about Mine house, because of the army.' The King of Israel would do battle for them, not with chariot and bow, but with meekness and peace. 'I will raise up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and make thee as the sword of a mighty man.'

But through this encouragement there breaks a warning. And the general purport of this warning cannot be mistaken. The Shepherd of Israel, seeing that all his care has been useless, breaks his crook and throws away the pieces, in token that he abandoned the hopeless task of tending so misguided a flock. It is not probable that the prophet actually presented himself on the streets of Jerusalem dressed as a shepherd, but only that in vision he saw himself doing the things which he here relates. Sometimes the prophets were required to dramatise what was revealed to them. Thus Ezekiel, in a striking counterpart to this vision of Zechariah's, was instructed to

take two sticks, on one of which he was to write, 'For Judah,' and on the other, 'For Joseph, the house of Ephraim and all the house of Israel his companions.' And these two sticks were to be joined one to another into one stick in his hand. And when the people asked him what this meant he was instructed to say: 'Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in Mine hand. And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes.' It is the opposite picture which Zechariah is now called upon to exhibit to the people; not a joining of two sticks to symbolise the union of Judah and Israel, but a breaking of a whole crook to symbolise the scattering of the flock. This might have been acted before the people, but the feeding of the

flock could scarcely have been conveniently represented in the city.

The Shepherd-symbol of God was familiar to the Jews. In private they had used the words of their shepherd-king, 'The Lord is my Shepherd.' In public they had heard the Levites singing, 'Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock.' The prophets had taken up the idea and elaborated it in such language as Isaiah's, 'He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arms, and carry them in His bosom.' And as God's care of His people was discharged by kings, priests, and prophets, appointed by Him, these were regarded as subordinate shepherds; and the Messiah, who was looked for as the fulfiller of all God's purpose of good to His people, was often thought of as the Good Shepherd—a title which, when He did come, He accepted as appropriate and illustrated in such a manner as to make it significant to His

people in all generations. So that in Churches which indulge in symbolism, the bishop still carries the crosier or shepherd's crook, to indicate that he carries on the work of Him who is the Head Shepherd of our souls. In ancient times these subordinate shepherds often fell under the reproof of God for their negligence and self-seeking. 'Woe to the shepherds who do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool: ye kill them that are fed, but ye feed not the flock!' Too often in modern times also have the shepherds forgotten that they exist for the flock, and not the flock for them. Too often have they sought their own advantage, both individuals and Churches accumulating wealth, and in many ways justifying the familiar satire of mediæval times: 'There used to be golden bishops carrying wooden pastoral staves, but instead of them we have now wooden bishops carrying golden staves.'

The symbolism of this prophecy would therefore present little difficulty to those for whom it was primarily meant. God's flock had fallen into evil hands; the natural protectors of the people were in fact their enemies, overtaxing them to maintain an extravagant royal splendour, and exacting from them priestly dues which bore no proportion to the work done. At various stages in the history of this vexed people the state of things here depicted actually emerged. In Herod's time they might fitly be called a flock of slaughter, kept for butchering purposes. God then makes one last attempt to save them. He sends a shepherd of His own selection to win the flock from the thralldom of their so-called shepherds, whose sole interest in the people arose from their expectation of making gain by them. This good shepherd goes out to his task with two staves—one a short cudgel to beat off wild animals, the other a long crook to help his sheep out

of holes and marshy ground. This 'rod and staff' he calls by significant names, as knights used to call their swords by pet names. The one crook he calls Graciousness ; the other, Bands or Concord —that is to say, he enters on his duties with the purpose of graciously defending the flock against assault from without, and of keeping the sheep together as one flock. Room was made for this good shepherd by cutting off king, priest, and prophet, three shepherds who had misled and abused the people.

But, good as the shepherd was, the flock refused to be managed by him, so that he was compelled to give them up and ask his discharge. This they readily gave him, at the same time showing the value they set upon his services by offering him the thirty shekels which was the average price of a slave. Taking this price to the Temple, as the place where work done by God should be paid, he casts this paltry sum down with contempt, and breaks

his staves as one who abandons as hopeless the task of feeding so worthless a flock. There is, however, always a remnant, the poor of the flock, the little ones, who appreciate God's care, and who are saved from the doom to which as a whole the flock is abandoned.¹

In this prediction there are various points of abiding interest. (1) The value set upon the good shepherd's offices and service. The prophet, representing God in His capacity of Shepherd of Israel, was valued at thirty pieces of silver. This was Israel's way of saying, 'Any slave could do as good service.' It was either a studied insult, or one of those insults which people commit through sheer stupidity and total misunderstanding of the persons and things with which they have to do. It is like offering a man sixpence for risking his life to save ours, whereby we show at

¹ This is more distinctly brought out in the last three verses of chapter xiii., which seem somehow to have slipped out of their place.

once the value we attach to our own life and to his. The prophet was therefore instructed to cast this price to the potter. From the circumstance that no ground looks so waste and forsaken and is so worthless as a worked-out brick-field; or because the potters commonly worked in the valley of Hinnom, where all refuse was shot; or because broken dishes were conspicuous among the other refuse; or because at that time pottery was the cheapest of all manufactures; from one reason or other, the expression, 'To the potter with it,' had come to be equivalent to saying, 'Throw away the worthless thing.' Thus God pronounces upon the price paid by the Jews for all their shepherd's care—'a goodly price, forsooth!' a price you might give to a potter for a dish which is produced in thousands, and which will soon find its way to the ash-pit with other broken ware. Is this the price at which men value the visitation of Heaven, the labour of God, the one exceptional thing

which throws a halo round the world and a light upon its history? Is this the price at which they reckon their God and their own inheritance of fellowship with Him?

These thirty pieces of silver unexpectedly and curiously emerge in the last scenes of our Lord's connection with the people on whom His shepherd-care was spent. This turned out to be the very sum with which the rulers bought the traitor. When they could stand the Shepherd's interference no longer, and sought to discharge Him, this was the sum they agreed upon as sufficient to accomplish their purpose. Nor was this the only coincidence. This paltry sum was cast into the house of the Lord. The traitor could not keep it; the coin seemed alive with accusations, it seemed to be turned into so many hissing and stinging serpents, and in the bitterness of his rage against those who had persuaded him to think this paltry sum was of more value than his Master, he hurled the

ringing silver at them, as if disannulling the bargain and flinging the guilt back upon them. And still further, the sum was actually applied to purchase a worked-out potter's field, worthless for all other purposes, but which was given up for this merely nominal price, and was thought good enough to bury strangers in. Manifestly the priests did not notice these coincidences, or they would have avoided purchasing the plot of ground and so fulfilling the prophecy. But they were led into this purchase by the fact of their having this blood-money in their hands—money which they could not appropriate to any holy, temple use ; and when they heard that Judas had hanged himself in a deserted clay-hole, it struck them as the obvious thing to do to purchase this place, which was now doubly worthless, having become a Field of Blood by his suicide, and bury him in it, thus putting him and his money at once out of sight. But though

the priests did not at the time notice the coincidences, no one can be surprised that when next in the order of the synagogue service this passage from the prophets was read, many should be struck with these analogies, nor that Matthew should draw pointed attention to them.

The amount and importance of the coincidence between the words of the prophet and the facts of the betrayal, different men will differently estimate. It seems to me that there is evidence of a supernatural intelligence and control ; but what it much more concerns us to observe is, that in two ages, five hundred years apart from one another, spiritual aid is held equally cheap and insolently rejected. It was not a savage heathen tribe that thus branded its own stupidity and coarseness of grain ; neither was this rejection due to the rude, lawless, immoral section of society. In both instances the most efficient spiritual help that could be furnished was rejected by the best educated, most

religious of the people ; by those who should have guided opinion.

In various practical ways men show what value they set upon Christ's pastoral care. We may be shocked at a Judas who, by his act, declares that the best use he can put his Master to, is to turn Him into money : we may be shocked at the blindness of men who, having Christ on earth beside them, should be willing to pay to get rid of Him. We may be shocked at some of the more obvious forms in which these sins repeat themselves ; we may scorn the man who will make no pecuniary sacrifice for his religion ; who likes a church where there is little to pay : we may be horrified when we detect that in any one instance we have shown ourselves to set a much higher value on money than upon our spiritual welfare—but, apart from the pecuniary way of estimating, there are many other ways in which we show the value we set on the pastoral care of Christ. If the sheep hear His voice and follow

Him, that suffices Him ; for He is no hireling, but seeks only the good of the sheep. Has our readiness to follow His guidance and to submit ourselves to His rule amply proved to Him that we appreciate His care? Does the difference between the intelligence of the sheep and the intelligence of the shepherd seem to us a fair representation of the difference between our ability to choose for ourselves and Christ's ability to choose for us? Or might His crook as well be broken for all the use it has been in keeping us out of the mire and near to what is good?

Pastoral care of some kinds we do learn to appreciate. One of the most stainless characters of ancient times opens his immortal notes on life with an acknowledgment of the benefits he had received from the various persons he had known in boyhood. 'From my grandfather I learned to be moral and to govern my temper. From the reputation and remembrance of my father I learned

modesty and manliness of character. From my mother, piety and beneficence, and abstinence not only from evil deeds but even from evil thoughts; and further, simplicity in my way of living'; and so on through a long series of persons in each of whom he had something to imitate, and to each of whom he owed some part of what he was. How gratefully do we all look back to, or how painfully we miss, the care a parent spent upon us! How gratefully do we recall the significant word that was spoken to warn us from hidden dangers! How keenly now do we appreciate the watchful unobtrusive guidance that strove to make the path of virtue pleasant to us; that day by day took the measure of our temptations and of our moral strength; that busied itself with our prospects and with a future that was far out of our own sight; that had us in all its calculations, and was ever considering the bearing things would have upon us, and sternly turned us aside from the

life which, in our ignorance of the world, we were choosing! Have we had any more valuable possession than the love that bore with our folly and shielded us from the results of our waywardness and vice, and sowed in us the seeds of all the good that can ever be in us? Are such love and tendance to be bought in any hiring-market for thirty pieces of silver?

But when we consider this patient care, we recognise that much of it was inspired by Christ; and we are also conscious that we have not yet outgrown the need of similar care. The time is far off when Christ may safely lay down His crook and leave us to ourselves. Things are so with us, that without the living and personal manifestation of God in Christ we should be almost entirely in the dark regarding God's nature and relation to us. The life that Christ now lives He lives for us, and guides and restrains His people by His unseen Spirit and visible provi-

dences. God has appointed that our spiritual life should come through Christ; that He should be the centre of spiritual influence for the race. And we might as well try to sustain our physical life on carbonic acid gas instead of pure air, as attempt to live independently of Christ. It has therefore its absurd as well as its pathetic side, when men, individually or in communities, profess great concern about good government, beneficial institutions, individual morality, while they ignore Christ and despise His guidance. They are a mere flock of sheep in conclave wagging their foolish heads, while the shepherd, who sees over the hedge and knows what they guess at, stands neglected.

But the thought which this subject inevitably stirs in every Christian mind is, that it lies in our own power to compensate in some degree for past neglect, and to mitigate the indifference with which the labour of the Great Shepherd is regarded. Each of

us can secure that He be welcomed and appreciated by at least one heart: that there be one heart in which His actions are rightly interpreted and by which it is clearly recognised that the work He has done is work which cannot be bought, and which nothing can accomplish for us but Divine self-sacrifice and patience. If the stroke of His crook be at times painful, it saves us from a pain that is greater. If again and again in life we find that to be forbidden which alone seems desirable, it is forbidden for reasons truly valid. Much that pains and wounds and grieves us is proof of the care, not of the carelessness, of Him who guides and tends us. He feels for us in all our pain and will compensate for all our loss. He who laid down His life for the sheep will save them from all that threatens to make His sacrifice fruitless. And the imagination can picture no happier condition than that of the man who passes through all

the darkness and troubles of this life with a constant and faithful docility, and suffers Christ to accomplish in him the whole design and desire of His infinite love.

CHAPTER VII

NATIONAL REVIVAL

(Chaps. xii. xiii.)

THE prophecies of this book close with predictions of the political importance and military glory of the Jewish people. This future greatness is somehow to be connected with or even to spring out of a poignant national repentance. The cause of this repentance is obscure, but apparently the nation is to be by some means awakened to its undutifulness and disloyalty to its Divine King. The people are to look upon Him whom they have pierced, and to mourn.

Stress is laid upon the circumstance that the repentance will be national and universal: 'The land shall mourn every family apart.' Once or twice in each generation there occur calamities, such as the Indian mutiny or the

Crimean war, when the mourning is not merely national but domestic, not merely domestic but national. As when the first-born of Egypt was slain, the death-wail rises from every household. The calamity is general, yet each feels as if it were peculiar to himself.

Natural as it is to look for the fulfilment of this prediction in the days succeeding the crucifixion of Christ, it cannot be said that in those days there was anything which could be called a national repentance. The awe which fell upon those who saw the Messiah die and who retired smiting their breasts probably soon passed away. On the part of the rulers there might for a few days be an uneasy shamefacedness. There might be vague fears during the silence of the night entering the minds of the thoughtful. There might be more animated discussions of the claims of Jesus, or a careful avoidance of the subject. But certainly even the revolution of feeling produced by the preaching of

Peter was circumscribed and far from being national.

Individuals have in all ages accepted their share of guilt in the crucifixion of Christ. Penitents have never shrunk from owning that but for their guilt Christ had not died. But this is far from fulfilling the prediction of a simultaneous, national, Jewish mourning, such as is here spoken of. Only the one nation which crucified the Messiah is capable of such a repentance. No other nation has this particular guilt of rejecting and crucifying their long-expected king, for whom they existed as a nation and apart from whom they seem to have no *raison d'être*. They only can exhibit a national repentance for this crime; they only can nationally reverse the verdict they passed upon their King.

And I believe that nothing would more rapidly accomplish the happy results depicted in these chapters, or more speedily win the world to Christ, than were

the Jews to complete their marvellous history by once again combining, and this time to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. The remorse would be terrible, a bitterness as of one 'mourning for his only son'; so terrible that no one can wonder that the Jews cannot think of it as a possible thing that they should have crucified their Messiah. And yet what event could be so exemplary to the world? Who could be such efficient missionaries as the countrymen of Paul, who are already found in every country and speaking every important language? The Jews themselves have never ceased to look forward to some national resuscitation. They have fallen away from some of their old beliefs and usages and hopes, but there seems ever to spring up again among them the expectation that they shall yet have a land and a king of their own. A Christian cannot fail to think that there is a finer consummation of their great history, and a future more profitable to the human race.

Here then we have a prediction of a national revival first manifesting itself and striking its fruitful root in a profound sorrow for past dereliction of duty, and developing into a craving for cleansing from all defilement and for severance from all that has characterised the sinful past. These are signs which accompany all revivals of religious life which spring from God's will and the outpouring of His Spirit.

There is, first, a looking upon Him whom we have pierced and a being in bitterness on His account. The applicability of this passage to the contrition awakened by the cross of Christ will not be questioned even by any who may believe that the prophecy has no positive reference to our Saviour. Certainly the most effective knowledge of sin and the most fruitful contrition are produced by a consideration of the significance of Christ's death. The bitterness of mourning produced by the cross has a healing virtue in it. Bitterness of

a similar kind every one has felt. We know what it is to bewail the results of our sin when we see these results in the grief and shame and suffering of our friends. We have done a selfish action, aiming at our own happiness without sufficient consideration of others, and now we see that owing to this action of ours, some innocent persons whom we love are compelled to pass a life of lessened happiness and to bear a burden all their days. This brings us daily compunction and sorrow. The parent sees that in his child which day by day speaks to him of his own heedlessness and folly and transgression, and the difficulties with which the innocent child has to contend bring the bitterest of reflections to the heart of the parent. Or the son, on the other hand, who at length recognises how ill he has requited a parent's love and has embittered and darkened the life he should have gladdened, when he looks on the unreproachful, loving face of him or her whom his ruthless-

ness has pierced, feels a bitter compunction and a keener distress than any disaster could inflict.

‘What spectre can the charnel send
So dreadful as an injured friend?’

If, as time rolls on, we come to see how much trouble and suffering our sins have brought into the lives of others, if we are compelled to recognise how frequently and sorely our sins which we thought concerned no one but ourselves have smitten others, we know the bitterness that accompanies the looking upon those whom we have pierced. Nothing brings a man lower in his own eyes; nothing so directly persuades him that sin is a real evil. To have blighted our own life is bitter, but to see others suffering in consequence of our wrong-doing is the extreme of humbling pain.

But the analogy used by the prophet is of a slightly different kind. He compares the sorrow out of which springs this national repentance, to the national mourning at the death of the good king

Josiah, when the whole nation bewailed him, driven in as he was to Jerusalem sorely hit by the archers, and his life's blood dripping from his chariot. Now, when we read the account of Josiah's death we find this circumstance brought out in the narrative, namely, that he perished in a cause with which he was not compelled to mix himself up, but which his kingly spirit prompted him to make his own. When Necho, king of Egypt, came with his troops to Carchemish, he sent ambassadors to Josiah, saying, 'What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against thee this day but against the house wherewith I have war: for God commanded me to make haste: forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that He destroy thee not.' But Josiah's sense of honour prevented him from listening to this warning; he went to battle and was pierced to his death. And as the people saw him brought home, his armour stained with

blood, their mourning was tenfold more bitter, because they knew it was not in any private quarrel of his own he had fallen, but had died as their king, sacrificed to his position and his own sense of what was due to his position as prince of Judah. Each one of them felt that noble as his life had been, his death had been nobler still; and that, true king, servant and representative of his people as he had ever shown himself in his life, he had never better borne his people's burden than when he entered that fatal battle which the weaknesses and sins of former generations and of his own people had made necessary. And they mourned him now as one whom they had pierced — not that their loyal hands would ever have inflicted those wounds which the Egyptian arrows had torn in his flesh, but because they were conscious that it was for them and in their cause he had fallen, and because they bitterly understood now how heavy and fatal a burden was the

crown of a nation like theirs. They felt that they were chargeable with his death, inasmuch as it was their quarrel he had espoused and in their cause he had died. His blood had been spilt in discharging their political duties and in redeeming their political mistakes. And the citizen who had that day gone apart to carry on business of his own, and whose own private and present prosperity prevented him from shedding a tear over the fallen king, would have been justly denounced as a heartless traitor with no right to any inheritance in Judah. The man who had not public spirit enough to feel that in a most true sense his king had died for him, for his home and liberty—the man who could not understand what the people meant by crying in the streets ‘we have pierced our king’—that man might well have been denounced as incredibly selfish, unpardonably bound up in his own narrow prosperity, the very worst kind of citizen.

And it is only the profound and dull-eyed selfishness that naturally possesses us which can prevent us from joining in the acknowledgment that we have pierced our King, and from feeling the bitterest compunction on this account. Only because He made our cause His own did our Lord suffer and die. Only because He undertook all our liabilities and accomplished what He saw the world chiefly needed did He suffer as He did. And to disclaim any connection with His death is to renounce our claim to be within His kingdom, and to depart on a private path of our own which can only bring us to increasing isolation and uselessness.

A second feature of the national revival here predicted was that there should be 'a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness,' so that the contamination and defilement of which any and all were conscious might be removed. The self-loathing produced by a sense of sin's pollution prevents men

from expecting any great future. And conscience seems to pronounce that for this self-loathing there is no remedy. The murderess looks at the stained hands in despair, and cries—

‘Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this
blood
Clean from my hand? No : this my hand
will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.’

And all men are dismayed to find how deeply the pollution of former sins cuts into the character and the life, and dims the lustre of all we are concerned in. Years of varied experience may stand between our old transgressions and our present state, but the defilement, like an unstanched wound, strikes through all that overlays it. More needful than even forgiveness is cleansing. No man can be happy while filled with self-loathing: nothing tends to make men so content with their old level as the sense of self-defilement. Were we conscious of spotless garments,

we should strive to keep them clean; but, spotted as they already are, what boots it to avoid specks that will add nothing to the stains already existing? Thus we cease to connect ourselves with any true spiritual glory in the future, and become resigned to a condition on which the trail of sin is everywhere seen.

Provision therefore is made for ridding men of this sense of defilement, which lies deeper than the fear of punishment and cuts the sinew of all effort. It is removed, so far as it can be removed, when the desire and hope of a new and pure character are sincerely cherished; when we cease to sympathise with our old self, and are no longer partakers in our own old sins; when the connection is cut between our old life and that which we now live. And this germ of a new life is sown in us when we believingly listen to the call of Christ. 'Now ye are clean,' said our Lord to His disciples, 'through the word which I have spoken unto you.'

They were conscious of perfect integrity in receiving the call of Christ. They had no repentances, no regrets for having chosen Him. They wished to be His and His only. In this new sense of devotedness to Christ their old sense of defilement was abolished. It is attachment to Christ, and belief in the power of this attachment to root evil out of the heart, that makes us new men. And in proportion as we are hearty and sincere in our devotion to Him are we conscious of integrity and purity, of inward cleanness.

A third feature which should characterise this great national revival is indicated in the words (xiii. 2), 'I will cause the prophets, and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land.' And so thorough was to be the revulsion from the state of feeling which could encourage false prophets, that even the parents of any one who presumed to prophesy would thrust him through. In many countries, more or less civilised, there are at the present day large numbers

of men who gain their livelihood by exercising those functions which are here denounced ; divining, soothsaying, casting out evil spirits, and so forth. And the existence of such false prophets implies the existence of a large amount of unbelief, superstition, and ignorance. Instead of endeavouring to detect the real criminal by the ordinary cross-examination of witnesses, and other ways of sifting evidence, one of these diviners is invited to point out the culprit, so that justice is upset. Instead of endeavouring to discover the real cause of disease, and so prevent its recurrence, a diviner is asked to perform certain magical rites by the bedside of the patient, so that all medical science is nipped in the bud. And worst of all, these false prophets are looked to as able to explain God's will and pry into the secrets of heaven, so that all application of the individual soul to God is discouraged and prevented. In Judah many had gained a living by fortune-

telling, by offering to get messages from the dead for the guidance of the living, and by professing to have special revelations from God about matters of state. This was to poison the stream of knowledge at its source. The very men who should have guided the people became their perverters, and led them astray. And one of the most welcome symptoms of a new state of matters would therefore be the entire cessation of such false teaching. If a lad showed a leaning towards divination and soothsaying, his very parents would put him to death. And so alive would the whole people become to the evil and wickedness of such courses, that no man would dare to assume the peculiar dress of the prophets or to be in any way recognised as a prophet. It was only when indelible marks were found upon his body, which proved that he had been convicted of divination and punished for it, that any one would be brought to confess that such was his profession.

It will be observed that to apply the words of the sixth verse to our Lord, because there is a mention of wounds in the hands, is out of the question. It is indeed almost blasphemous to refer to Him words which were originally levelled against the very worst class of *false* prophet. And that the words have sometimes been so applied is only another illustration of the ignorant and irreverent recklessness with which phrases from the Old Testament are dislocated from their context and are perverted to utterly alien uses.

Every revival of religion in the individual or the community must go hand in hand with zeal for the truth, with the renunciation of superstition and ignorance. These false prophets both in Judah and in other lands have been driven out before the advance of truth of every kind, scientific as well as religious. All truth belongs to God and tends to His glory. Science is His as much as religion. 'The

world is His and the fulness thereof,' and whatever can be found in that world will help on His cause. You deaden the power of idolatry and false religion now by sending to the heathen scientific medical men and teachers, as well as by sending evangelists. Delivering them from the thralldom of error and superstition, you bring them so much nearer truth and to God. And we ourselves also have doubtless much to learn from science, which will give us wider and deeper views of God and of all truth. And it is the man who is most at one with His Lord who will most fearlessly welcome every fresh light that dawns upon His mind, knowing that all light tends to reveal Him who is Himself in all and through all.

The superstition that prevails in our own religious views and practices, as well as the superstition that prevails in Romanism, will be dispelled by that light which comes together with religious warmth. Our hope lies

in the continuance of resolute serious-minded inquiry into religious matters. Serious men will in the long run be drawn where there is freest access to the truth. If we imitate the Church of Rome, and say that the Church has the truth and that the individual has no right to inquire but only to learn, our day is done. Our day is done when among us men see what they saw in Rome :

‘ Strength by limping sway disabled,
And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly (doctor-like) controlling skill
And simple truth miscalled simplicity.’

The great danger in our day in connection with the Church of Rome is that men fling themselves into her arms to be protected from the terrifying images of doubt that crowd our atmosphere. Some of the ablest, most devout and godly, most saintly and Christ-like, most influential and sincere of our contemporaries have left their Protestant position and have joined the Church of Rome. And the moving cause

in the case of some of them is, that being of an irrepressibly inquiring mind, and having at once a most earnest *desire* to believe and a subtle disposition that suggests all manner of difficulties and doubts, they have felt that the exercise of private judgment was a heavier burden than they could carry. They have foreseen that inquiry in their case would be endless, that they could never satisfy their own subtle intellects; they have feared they might become sceptics; and shrinking from this as the most painful issue, they have put an end to their hesitation by renouncing private judgment and submitting themselves to the living voice of God in the Church. The process of mind that results in such action is illogical, inconsistent, self-stultifying; but it is frequently rather a process of feeling than a process of thought which guides men to the Church of Rome. And the process of feeling is something like this: I wish to be a child of God, I wish to be

religious, I need a Father for my spirit ; but I cannot satisfy myself about Christianity ; there are difficulties I cannot solve ; I must therefore conceive of religion as a matter regarding which I am to follow my instincts rather than my logical faculty, and I therefore give up the attempt to satisfy my intellect in this sphere and yield myself to that great Church which has most prominently and in all ages represented Christianity.

Wherever then you find that rare combination of a profoundly religious nature with a subtle sceptical mind, there you will also find that the Church of Rome has attractions. Practically that Church retains her hold by providing a religion that has nothing to do with the intellect or with external evidences. The Church presents itself as the great evidence of religion, as the present manifestation of Christ.

And however hard a battle Rome may have to fight with reason and science in the coming

years, Protestantism will have no less difficulty in adopting and adjusting to the fundamentals of her creed, all that science brings to light, and all the new and larger ideas that the progress of events will discover. We cannot, like Romanism, declare science our foe. Protestantism and science are allies and blood relations, and if we are to maintain our religious life at all, it must be in the full blaze of modern discovery and intellectual light, and not among the moles and bats, in the holes where the relics of superstition have had their haunt.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONSUMMATION

(Chap. xiv.)

THE highly figurative representation given in this chapter was apparently not intended to be a realistic picture of any one event. It conveys the impression that God and His people will triumph, and will do so by miraculous interposition at the hour when appearances are most against them. It shows us the day of the Lord opening in gloom but light at evening ; great calamities falling upon the city of God, but resulting in her being lifted as the conspicuous, life-giving metropolis of the race. When already the enemies of Jerusalem have stormed the city and are sacking it, when she is suffering all the horrors which even well-disciplined troops can scarcely be withheld from inflicting on a town that has long

resisted their siege, when heaps of spoil are piled up in her open squares and savage soldiers are quarrelling over the booty, when the women and children and men who have escaped the first slaughter are tremblingly waiting to learn their fate, then the Mount of Olives shall cleave in two parts, and through the valley thus made the inhabitants shall flee. This friendly earthquake is the sign of the Lord's coming, the beginning of that day of the Lord which is described in the remainder of the chapter.

The chief points in this description are that that day, which is *one*, or unique, and known only to the Lord, shall be dim and hazy, a gloomy twilight, but shall clear eventually to bright and cheerful light. There shall also flow through the land both east and west, both to the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean, a perennial stream of water, refreshing and fertilising the whole country. Jehovah shall be owned as God in the whole earth. There shall

be one God, and His name One. His sanctuary also shall be elevated in the sight of all men. Then follows, in vers. 12-19, the announcement that those who refuse to own God and His sanctuary shall be punished; and the prophecy closes with the remarkable prediction that all things shall be holy.

The physical accompaniments of this great day, the murky twilight and earthquake and pestilence, give us no certain outline by which we can represent it to the mind. We turn, therefore, to its spiritual characteristics, the changes which will then be discernible in men's ideas and habits, and here we find much to instruct.

The grand result of this great manifestation, which the prophet entitles 'the day of the Lord,' is enounced in these words: 'The Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord and His name one.' This, then, is to be the great result of the world's history, of

the world's experience, and of the world's thought. It is not, as we might have expected, the starting-point. But that which all is to lead on and up to is, that men shall at last know and own their God and their unity in Him. The Old Testament prophets sometimes speak of the day of the Lord and of His appearing in terms which fitly apply to the coming of Christ and God's manifestation in Him; but sometimes they use language which is by no means exhausted by that first coming and manifestation, but awaits for its fulfilment some further revelation of the glory of God. This present order of things is to terminate in this final manifestation of God, which is not so much a new revelation as a completion or application of that which has already been made in Christ. We can in looking at the Old Testament history partly see how things were preparing for Christ's coming, and yet men could not have gathered—as indeed in point of fact not

even the best instructed persons did gather—either the time or the mode of His coming. So now we may dimly discern that things are working on towards His return to reign in glory, and yet it is impossible to say when or how this shall be. But the first expectation having been fulfilled, it becomes the best guarantee that the second also will not be disappointed.

Besides, all this that we read in the Bible is so much in keeping, in its own way, with what science tells us, that our belief is aided and made easy. Science tells us that for hundreds of thousands of years this earth has been passing through tremendous changes—changes to which this cleaving of the Mount of Olives is like the scattering of a molehill by a passer's foot—and has been slowly, very slowly we should say, assuming the shape, the temperature, the atmosphere, the inhabitants it now has. It tells us also that though there have been great convulsions, breaking again

and again the old order of things, bringing perpetual ice where there had been tropical vegetation, and extinguishing species of animals that have never again appeared, yet that through all there is distinctly apparent a connected thread which links the last appearances to the first. Now all this confirms, in three important respects, what these prophets tell us.

First.—Science and prophecy agree in calling our attention to the fact that God works on the principle of beginning at the beginning, of commencing with the seed small as a grain of mustard seed, but which is destined to fill the world's gaze as a tree; God begins with what is smallest and lowest and works on to what is highest and best. We should have said God must *begin* by giving to men the fullest knowledge of Himself. Science says, 'No; or if He does so, He acts in contradiction to all His other works, and to that mode of operation which meets us everywhere, and seems to be His law.'

Second.—Science shows us that though things are only gradually and therefore very slowly evolved, yet there are great breaks and new points of departure every here and there. That is to say, the history of this earth, continued through all these countless ages, has not been regularly continuous like the growth of a tree or of our own body, but it has resembled rather the growth of a nation, which is interrupted every now and again by a revolution, which is found to be helpful to its growth and to set it at once on a quite different level from that on which it has hitherto been. Or these breaks in the history of the earth may be compared to the breaks in the life of an individual, such, for example, as marriage, in which a man at one step enters upon quite a new stage and style of life, and not by any merely natural growth but by the action of his own will advances into new relationships. Similarly, the Bible lays open to us a history which, while in the

main it is a gradual evolution or growth, is broken in upon at one or two points by new forces, which compel it to a new course, or lift it at once to a new level, or suddenly introduce elements which are to characterise the new period.

And *Third*.—Not only do science and the Bible agree in showing us that the histories with which they are severally concerned are in both cases a slow growth from small and distant beginnings, interrupted every now and again by what seem to be new forces and interferences from without, but they also agree in affirming that there is one plan, or at all events one system, running through the whole, linking together the remotest past with the present, and proving that everything is connected with everything else, and can somehow be traced back to one common origin.

The prophet, foreseeing that all nations would give in their adhesion to the one true God,

Jehovah, speaks of this under the forms with which he and his people were familiar. From all nations men would go up year by year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of Tabernacles. It is nothing to him that this is practically impossible. It is nothing to him that long religious pilgrimages are attended with disadvantages greatly outweighing any advantages to be derived from them. It is nothing to him that the unity of religion which is secured by all men acknowledging one local centre is a greatly inferior unity to that which is secured by one spirit pervading all from centre to circumference. All this is nothing to the prophet whose business it is to convey to the men he has to do with a vivid impression of a great idea or event. The men to whom he was sent could not conceive of any religious unity which did not involve the recognition of one local, visible centre, as little as

Mohammedans or Papists can. The idea of a universal religion could be conveyed to their minds only by some such representation as this, that all kinds of foreigners would be seen coming up year by year to Jerusalem to celebrate the great Jewish feasts. When he affirmed that all nations would one day come up and keep the feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem, he himself and those he spoke to understood that their God was to be universally acknowledged; and to object that the prophecy has not been fulfilled in the letter is very much the same as if you were to object to a person paying you in sovereigns a sum of money he had spoken of as so many dollars.

But why specify the feast of Tabernacles? The feast of Tabernacles was the commemoration of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness, and their dependence on God when they dwelt in tents, not tilling the ground in fixed places of abode. And it was accordingly celebrated annu-

ally when the harvest had been finished, and it was looked upon in the light of a national thanksgiving or acknowledgment that still they were dependent on the same God who had kept them alive without harvests. It is the acknowledgment, therefore, of the God of nature appearing and manifesting Himself as the God of grace and salvation; it was the feast by which all who engaged in it acknowledged the identity of the God who delivered His people from Egypt with the God who upholds all nature's laws. Most suitably, therefore, is this the feast in which the nations join; coming from distant lands, where nature appears in different aspects, they join in acknowledgment that Israel's God is that one in whom they live and move and have their being.

This acknowledgment, however, would not be without exception, not absolutely universal. On those who refused this acknowledgment, judgment would

fall—judgment congenial with the offence—a withholding of rain which is the essential of harvest; and in a country like Egypt, where no rain falls, or none to speak of, other punishment would occur. This suiting of punishment to the offence is a marked characteristic of God's government; a principle which has been constantly remarked upon. Dante has largely utilised and illustrated it in his great poem. In his visit to the realms of punishment he saw tyrants immersed in a sea of blood; gluttons exposed with all their pampered softness to a sleety tempest of cold, discoloured, stinking hail; the proud bending for ever under heavy burdens which will not suffer them to stand erect; schismatics who have rent the Church in two themselves cleft asunder; those who had pried into the future and professed prophetic powers had now their own faces reversed, so that they could not look before them and see their own way. A great part of the pain of punishment,

and a great part of its remedial action, arise from this feature of it. Our punishment becomes insufferable not from its mere pain, but from the circumstance that the pain continually reminds us of the iniquitous and gratuitous and self-willed folly that has made this pain our lot in life. Were it not self-inflicted we could bear it; were it pain incurred in a good cause we could glory in it; but, as it is, we can but hang our heads in shame and bear our misery alone and in secret as best we may. The only solace is that this misery may be remedial; that this very pointed reference it bears to our sin may be helpful in separating us from the sin that caused it. It does not always or necessarily do so. To the impotent man whom our Lord healed after thirty-eight years of punishment, He said, 'Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee,' seeing that after this lifelong punishment the power of sin was not broken. And how often have we seen the same; a

man all through life keeping himself back and gathering all kinds of misery around himself by persisting in sin, so that again and again we say, 'How is it possible he can persist in sin, no better, no wiser, for all he has come through?' But so it is: no amount of mere punishment changes the heart.

There is the same rational and significant connection still existing between the sins and the punishments of communities. But if this connection is often overlooked, ignored, or violently thrust out of sight by individuals, communities seem much more commonly to disregard its significance. The conscience of the community is scattered and lacks concentration. Yet in some matters it has been aroused, and the community has tardily shaken off a burden or cleansed itself from a blot. Revolutions and riots slowly lead us to see that injustice was being done to large classes of the people. Cholera and typhoid fever slowly do their part in compelling attention to

God's laws. And now in prolonged commercial depression¹ we seem to be having another lesson read to us, if only there are men of skill and courage enough to read it for us and lead the way in enforcing it. When catastrophes of a disastrous kind occur some law has been broken, and if we are to be free from their repetition these laws must be discovered and must be observed. We are called to face a period of distress such as need not have occurred. Thousands are thrown out of employment and must be provided for, because some social law has been broken. No doubt accidents happen, disasters occur, in which no one is much to blame; but until inquiry is made, no one has a right to assume that the accident was unavoidable. We should feel that the authorities were not doing their part if no inquiry was made into each railway accident as it occurs; and the fact

¹ Written at a time of commercial depression.

that other disasters are of greater magnitude and of longer duration and of more obscure origin ought not to lead us to class them as unavoidable calamities. As certainly as the dearth and drought in the countries spoken of by Zechariah were meant to call attention to God and His laws, so certainly is the present distress meant to draw attention to what has been culpably neglected. The present distress will pass away, but it will be a thousand pities if it does so before it has compelled those whose duty it is thoroughly to understand the real cause of it, and to take steps to prevent its recurrence. The contrivances for keeping the balance between different interests in society are of the rudest description; and if through the present distress some advance is made in adjusting class to class and making society more like a coherent unity, even those who suffer most will surely acknowledge that their suffering has not been in vain, but that they have

been indirectly and perhaps unintentionally working out the welfare of future generations.

But that which is especially remarkable in this description of the consummation of all things is the abolition of the distinction between things sacred and secular. Men who have keenly felt the degradation and misery of our present entanglement in moral evil have seen two ways out—but neither of these does the Jewish prophet welcome.

1st.—He does not promise us an emancipation from all connection with things material, as if such an emancipation would of itself deliver us from evil into a state we could permanently live in with comfort. Some of the religions which have most powerfully appealed to earnest men have acquired their influence mainly by promising emancipation from sin by emancipation from all connection with the body and the material world. It is the flesh, they say, that leads us astray. Crucify the flesh,

bring your body under, separate yourself from the world, do with as little food as possible, do not attend to the cleansing of the body or any of its wants, do not comfort it in any way, and you will be free from sin. In which there is a great deal more truth than we commonly admit, but when accepted as containing the whole truth, and as being in itself a perfect way of salvation, it is of course delusive. In this Jewish prophet there is none of the wholesale condemnation of matter you find in many other teachers. He, too, sees a way out of this present evil world ; but it is not by emancipation from the body, nor by separation from the world, nor by ceasing to have to do with such demoralising creatures as horses ; but by bringing a holy spirit into all occupations, by writing on the bells that dangle from the horse-collars the inscription on the High-priest's frontlet, which had given him entrance to the Holiest of All.

This, then, is to be a character-

istic feature of our eternal condition, that we are no longer to feel as if some moral contagion attached to the material world and to all worldly occupations; as if we had to admire the scenery of this earth by stealth, or to retain a scruple and hesitation about devoting time and energy to trade, or as if God turned away in displeasure or looked in pity and contempt when we enjoy any natural and innocent pleasure. Something of the ascetic feeling clings to us still, and few of us have the same clearness of perception about the holiness of things secular as Zechariah had. Nothing is itself sinful or profane which God has made; nothing common or unclean; but everything God has created is good and to be received with thanksgiving. Look at the life of our Lord, how He found all things sacred—birds, plants, dinings-out, paying His taxes, fishing, adventures on the lake—all occasions and all relationships of life. In His life the distinction between sacred

and secular is no longer possible. His glory was manifested at a marriage supper no less than in the synagogue or the temple.

But some lives fall quite manifestly into two parts, which, for all that appears, have little affinity to one another. Their sacred duties stand by themselves, and their secular duties are perfectly distinct. Some persons, indeed, seem to have no idea that religion is anything else than the devout performance of certain observances and the keeping up of certain appearances. If you deprived them of the power of going to church, or of using certain phrases and forms of worship ; if you took out of their day one or two half-hours in it, you would really leave them no religion at all ; so easily separable is their religion from their life. Now so long as religion is a separate thing like this, it lies as a burden on a man, like undigested food in the stomach, only giving him uneasiness and dulling his vision and weakening

him. It is a weight and a nuisance as long as it is a foreign body, a thing separate from the man's most real self. It is only when it is thoroughly absorbed and enters into the blood that it is a source of comfort and of strength, and becomes an unnoticed factor in all he does. Religion is a thing which need not have a separate place; it is to be the health-giving element in the atmosphere of the world, and must be found everywhere. It is a thing we can carry with us into all we do, for it is a matter of the heart and of the spirit; it is unison in will with God. Therefore in the perfected kingdom of God which Zechariah had in view, he saw no outward change effected. There were still horses with all their trappings; there were the sounds of trade and friendly intercourse in the streets; but the spirit was different. That kingdom does not require that men be grouped in relationships different from those which now connect us, or

be engaged in occupations now unknown ; it requires only that men live with God in all things.

2nd.—But Zechariah is, on the other hand, no secularist, who thinks that merely by forgetting God and going on with our worldly occupations we satisfy all requirements. The distinction between sacred and secular is to be abolished, not by making everything secular, but by making everything sacred ; not by making the bowls which held the victims' blood like the pots in which the priests boiled their dinners, but by making these pots, which were no part of the sacred furniture, as sacred as the bowls which were essential to the worship. 'Holiness to the Lord' is not to be obliterated from the High Priest's frontlet, so that the officiating priest might feel as little solemnised when putting on his mitre and entering the Holiest of All, as if he were going into his stable to put the collar on his horse ; but when he puts the collar on his horse and goes out

to his day's work, or his day's recreation, he is to be as truly and lovingly at one with God as when with sacrifice and incense and priestly garments he goes into the Holy of Holies.

This state, then, can never be attained by merely abolishing or neglecting sacred times and ordinances and observances. This is merely to ape a manhood we have not attained, and so to secure that we shall never attain it. In the state anticipated by the prophet we shall not need the ordinances we now need, or the Sabbaths that now recall us to the thought of things eternal; but he who forthwith abolishes his Sabbath because in a perfect state he would not need it, might as well leap confidently into deep water far from shore because, were he a perfectly accomplished man, he ought to be able to swim. We *ought* to be all the week in the state of spirit which the Sabbath rest and services induce, but *until* we are so in point of fact, we cannot do without the Sab-

bath. And the consequence of assuming a superiority to such spiritual aid as the Sabbath brings would inevitably result in our bringing that day down to the worldly week-day level, and not in bringing the week up to its level. The student hopes one day to be able to do without grammar and dictionary, but he knows he will arrive at that desirable state only in proportion as he now makes diligent use of grammar and dictionary.

Let us then so use the means of grace that we can rationally expect that one day we shall not any longer need them. When the diligent student has at length become a man of education and culture, all he does he does as a man of culture; that is the atmosphere he lives in, and you cannot run a distinction through his life and say, 'These things he does in the spirit of an educated man, and these others not.' Education is wrought into the grain of his mind, and is part and parcel of the character—part and

parcel of the man. But all this he has from his former recognition of his ignorance, of the broad distinction between ignorance and knowledge, and his resolution to bridge that interval. The present is the time given to us to bridge the interval between the secular and the sacred ; to bring up all our employments to the level of 'holiness to the Lord.' Let us fix in our minds that this earth and its fulness belong to God ; that He is with us in all our occupations. Let us make it our persistent, daily renewed aim to live for Him, to give ourselves to Him body and soul ; and that which threatens to cut us off from all that attracts and makes life interesting will practically be found to be the gateway to more abundant, intense, and vital life.

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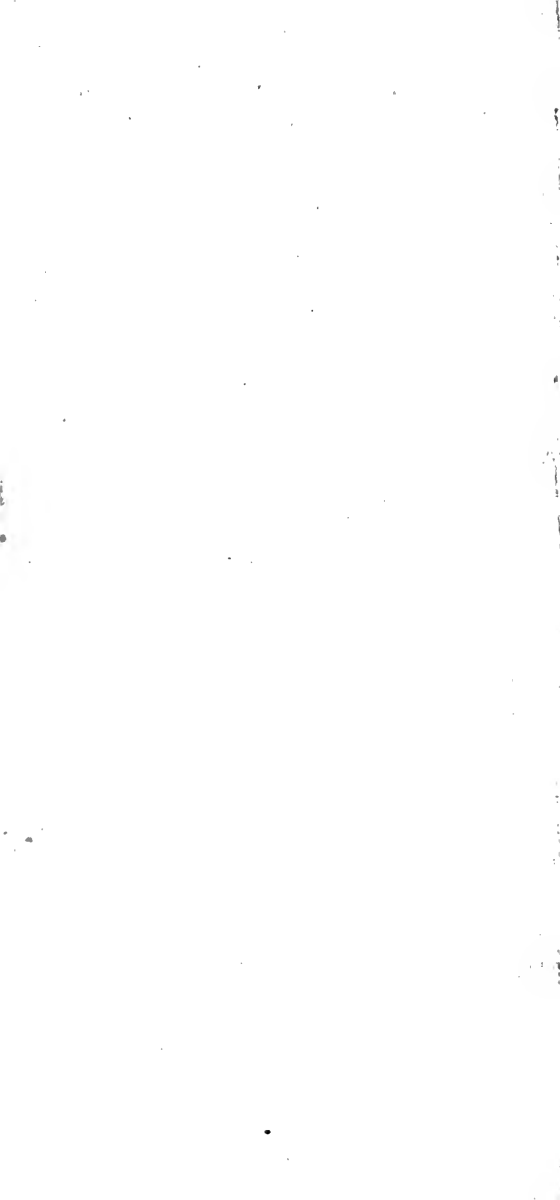
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